

Children's & Parents' Perception of Activities Offered by Children Cultural Centers in Palestine

A Phenomenological Study in a Selected Child Cultural Center

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the children's and their parents' perception and experiences of the activities offered by children cultural centers in Palestine. The main research question is: how do the children's and parents' perceive the activities offered by a selected child cultural center in Palestine? The sub-research questions are: 1) what are the children and parents' motivation for participation in the activities?, 2) what are the children and parents perceived impact of activities offered by children cultural centers on children's learning and development? and what are the children's and parents' thoughts about the children cultural center as an out-of-school setting?

The methodological approach of this study is qualitative, with mixed designs; a phenomenological study is used to investigate the concept of activities perceived by the participants', and a case study design to investigate the context of the child cultural center. The children who have been participating in the center's activities represent the population of the study. Sampling includes; Criterion, Snowball, and Criteria Matrix types for selecting the children who are the main informants of the study. The informants are eight children aged 10-12 years (two of them with special needs); their parents; the activity animators; and the director of the center. The instrument of data collection is semi-structured interviews, and by consulting documents.

The findings show that activities are perceived form multiple dimensions; recreational, educational & learning enrichment, interaction and communication. There was special emphasis on the relationship between the children and the animators in which was also regarded as motivation. In addition to the motivation, the findings show important aspects of activities such as; free and voluntary participation, frame factors like the center's facilities and free of charge activities, development of activities, positive end-products of activities, variety of activities, age appropriateness, children active involvement.

The findings indicate positive change among children both in school and home contexts; regarding their educational and cognitive skills; interaction and communication; and socio-emotional development. The center as an out-of-school setting is perceived as a welcoming setting for all children with and without impairment, educational support, and community social. This perception is peculiar in a time of war where children are easily exposed to several traumatic experiences.

Key words: children, activities, children cultural centers, child development, socio-emotional wellbeing.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to more than 940 children who were killed during the ongoing Intifada, to their lives, and to their dreams that never came true

I also dedicate this work to all children around the globe who are eager to learn, to play, and to be happy

"After the Nakba¹, when the Palestinians lost everything, we were left with one choice: to rise up again, armed with the tools of education and knowledge. It seemed to my wife Laila and me that without the development of free individuals and free thoughts, no society would be capable of assuming its self-determination. We therefore decided that investing in the children and youth of Palestine and the Arab world would be our most valuable bequest."

Abdel Muhsin AL-Qattan² (1998)

¹ Nakba is the 1948 "catastrophe" surrounding the establishment of the state of Israel, resulting in dispersion of Palestinian to West bank, Gaza Strip, and worldwide.

² The founder and sponsor of the Child Cultural Centre (context of this study)

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Children have always been a center of interest for educationists, who seek positive development for young learners in various formal and non-formal learning contexts. The ultimate goal is the development of children's emotional, social, psychological, and cognitive aspects. So, children are involved in educational programs and activities based on predefined goals to facilitate their gaining knowledge, skills, and awareness in different contexts addressing their needs, inclinations, and interests. In Palestine, children cultural centers are providing activities and services to children beside school, aiming at contributing to the children's growth, development, and overall to their well-being.

This chapter introduces the purpose and the background for the study, a country profile including the educational system, explanation of the life of Palestinian children in relation to war and their use of leisure time, and description of the Children Cultural Center selected for the purpose of the study.

1.2 General Background of the Study

A limited number of studies discussed the nature of activities offered by children cultural centers, their learning environment, and their impact on children's learning and development in Palestine. The Palestinian society is distinguished for being a young society since the number of individuals below the age of 18 was estimated at mid 2005 at approximately 2.0 million (52.5% of the total population of the Occupied Palestinian Territory), according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, (2006).

This study gives an opportunity to listen, in the first place, to the "Children's Voice"; the voice of their understanding of their experience; the voice of what motivates them to learn and develop; and the voice of what makes them happy. Listening to the

"Children's Voice" signifies how the child becomes visible (Engebresten & Johnsen, 2005). In addition, this study listens to the children's parents and activities providers at the Children cultural centers in Palestine.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1991) states clearly that:

1. State Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in the cultural life and the arts.
2. State Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural an artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for culture, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.

Children in Palestine are deprived of experiencing basic needs like safety under occupation. They lack public and private recreational facilities, in shadow of low socio-economic status of the families in general. Thus, the traditional instructional teaching in the Palestinian schools yields limited access to experience extra-curricular activities for several reasons. Children are challenged by heavy curriculum, poor school equipment, and crowded schools and classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2000). Therefore, formal education is in short of addressing children needs considering Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) states that "The education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential".

1.3 Brief Background of the Country (Palestine)

Historical Palestine before 1948 was geographically located in the Middle-East, with Egypt to the south, Jordan to the east, Lebanon and Syria to the north, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. Centrally located between Asia and Africa, Palestine was for many years occupied for many years through the long history by different governments, lastly by Israel in the 1948, when Palestinians were expelled from their homeland, and displaced by force to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 1967, Israel occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip which now known as the Occupied Palestinian Territory (see appendix 1 & 2).

In 1987, the 1st *Intifada*³ started in response to the continued occupation and oppression; it ended with signing of the Oslo Peace Accord⁴ that allowed the Palestinians to establish the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Soon after in 2000, the 2nd *Intifada* started which is still taking place. Both, the 1st and 2nd *Intifada* caused huge damage to the daily life of Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza Strip, between which there are no possibilities for movement.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2006), the estimated population of the Palestinian Territory was 3.8 million in mid 2005, of which 2.4 million were in the West Bank and 1.4 million in Gaza Strip. More than half of the Palestinians (52.7%) were children below the age of 18 years (1.983 million child).

1.3.1 Education in Palestine:

In 1994, the Palestinian National Authority started to take over the responsibility of education in Palestine, where it built schools and developed the first Palestinian Curriculum. PNA was challenged by destroyed infrastructure after occupation. The number of students in the classrooms is around 40-55 students. Schooling run in two shifts (morning, and afternoon). The provision of education is divided into 3 main education providers; the government, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the private sector. Table (1) show the distribution of students in the three different sectors.

Authority	Basic		Secondary	
	Class	Students	Classes	Students
Government	18348	637172	3734	120443
UNRWA	6124	254552	0	0
Private	2551	61897	244	4424
Total	27023	953621	3978	124867

Table (1): Distribution of students and classes by cycle & supervising authority in 2005-2006.

Source: Ministry of Education (2007) <http://www.moe.gov.ps/stats/statistic.pdf>

³ Intifada: is the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.

⁴ Signed in Washington (September 1993).

In its evaluation report the Ministry of Education (2000) indicated that the educational strategies lack several educational activities that could play part in the development of the child's personality and could urge him/her to continue for mastery. Furthermore, the main focus is given on the child achievements more than enjoyment of the learning process itself. The system, thus, drives the children only to master in the different subjects rather than promoting the child's development, growth and personality as a whole. However, some schools attempt to involve their students in extra-curricular activities by organizing annual scientific and cultural competitions, celebrating social or national anniversaries, and arranging summer camps (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Those activities have been decreased or almost stopped after 2001 due to the 2nd *Intifada*. In comparison, since 1999, Norwegian municipalities have been "legally obliged to provided day-care facilities before and after school hours for children attending the first four grades. Day-care facilities must provide amenities for play and participation in cultural and recreational activities appropriate for the age, level of physical ability and interests of the children"⁵

Importance of education for Palestinians people: The importance of education and learning for Palestinians is high both due to religious and cultural backgrounds. Since the *Nakba* in 1948, when Palestinians lost everything including their homes and land and ended up as refugees, Palestinian families have done all their best to ensure education for their children although they could only afford to live in tents and struggle against poverty.

Education is highly valued among all the age groups, particularly for school-aged, even though the school and the way to school are no longer safe due to the daily life-threatening accidents like shelling, air strikes, and bombing. Palestinians kept and keep undertaking their education (see appendix 3).

⁵Education in Norway (2004) published by The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research

1.3.2 The children of Palestine:

Palestinian Children use of leisure time: Many factors are contributing to the children use of leisure time, mainly the life-threatening and intense insecurity situation added to the lack of public facilities and the aspects connected to poor socio-economic status of families. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2001), 12.3% of the children's day is spent on cultural and social activities, and 19.6% of their day is spent on learning (school and home work). Furthermore, 44.4% of the children aged 10-17 years in the Palestinian territory are willing to be involved in cultural activities during their free time. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2006) indicates that watching TV ranks number one activity among children (aged 10-17 years). There is an obvious variation between male and female children with respect to regular activities. Accordingly, 43.3% of female children practice painting compared to 24.4% of males, whereas 2.5% of female children play sport games compared to 43.5% among male children.

Palestinian children exposure to traumatic events

*"State parties undertake to respect and ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts, which are relevant to the child"*⁶

The Palestinian children main challenge is to live, learn, and develop within a war surroundings with its traumatic experiences; especially because children in particular get continuously targeted. Both the 1st & 2nd Intifadas resulted in huge casualties among Palestinian children.

Martyrs Under 18 Years Old	Percentage of Martyrs Children	Total
919	22.7%	

Table (2): Number of martyred Palestinian children from 28/9/2000 till 31/12/2005

Source: Ministry of Health, January 2006 (<http://www.moh.gov.ps>)

The majority of these children were killed and injured while going about normal daily activities, such as going to school, playing, shopping, or simply being in their homes. 64% of children got killed during the first six months of 2003 as a result of Israeli air and

⁶ UN 1991, The Convention on the Rights of the child, Article 38-1

ground attacks, or from indiscriminate shooting from Israeli soldiers (Cook, 2004). Ministry of Education (2007) reported that 669 school students and 176 teachers were killed from the beginning of the 2nd *Intifada*. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2004) survey conducted on children aged 5-17 years, 11% suffer from extreme nervousness and continues shouting, fear of loneliness and fear of darkness and 8.4% suffer from bad temper, 7.1% suffer from frustration, 6.3% suffer from nightmares, and 4.3% suffer from increased thinking of death. A study "revealed a high level of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among Palestinian children: 23% of the children were suffering from acute level of PTSD symptoms, and 29.2% are suffering from a moderate level" (Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2004).

1.3.3 Cultural centers in Palestine

Cultural Centers are Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). They have long history of providing different social, educational, health and emergency services to Palestinians. Since the Israeli occupation in 1967 they offered extended and/or supplementary services along with those which are already there. After 1994, some Municipalities started to provide cultural services, like exhibitions and libraries. In regard to the cultural and educational NGOs, many of them work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the field of education, learning and culture. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2006), the number of cultural centers reached 213, including 174 operating centers (74 centers are not operating); 122 of which are in the West Bank, and 52 in Gaza Strip. The results also indicated that 36.8% of the Cultural Centers are equipped to receive individuals with special needs (41.0% in the West Bank, and 26.9% in Gaza Strip).

In the non-formal education sector, various Palestinian NGOs and community centers are working with children and adolescent in a variety of ways and methodologies, attempting to provide an enriching environment where children and adolescent would explore alternative ways of education, practicing hobbies and interests, where they may find it possible to use their energy and potentials. The environment of the

activities can be institutionalized (within the center's premises), or de-institutionalized (out-reach, mobile programs, out door programs). Some schools work as cultural centers in the 3-month summer vacation through organizing summer camps for children.

1.4 The Arena of this Study:

1.4.1 Description of the child cultural center⁷

The center⁸ is located in Gaza city. It is a non-profit cultural and educational organization. It opened in September 2005 as one project of four main projects for education, culture, and arts belonging to a foundation working in Palestine. The foundation seeks to invest in people and to secure a fertile cultural soil upon which they can build their lives in order to achieve a more effective, meaningful and lasting participation in various aspects of human endeavor. The center's building stands on 3,000 square meters. The center offers quality library, information, and training and entertainment services to children aged up to fifteen years, and to their parents and professionals. (see appendix 4).

The center's Mission Statement⁹:

"To provide the space and the means for children to access different sources of information and knowledge based on their preferences, their experiences and their mental, physical, emotional and imaginative needs, in a free, stimulating and playful environment"

The Center's Vision¹⁰: "We look forward to the day when no Palestinian child will be deprived of cultural and library services".

⁷ Information of this part was gathered from the Center's documents, the selected centre for this study.

⁸ For research ethical considerations, the center's name is not mentioned. Child cultural centre will be used to indicate the arena of this study.

⁹ Based on the Center's Strategic Plan 2005-2007

¹⁰ ibid

1.4.2 The Center's goals

The center's goals are to:

- To encourage the love of reading;
- To promote self-expression and self-education;
- To promote appreciation for and respect of individual freedom;
- To strengthen respect of other people's differences;
- To encourage co-operation, dialogue and voluntary work;
- To promote sense of Arab cultural identity, and respect for and curiosity about other cultures;
- To strengthen an appreciation of the arts, including music, cinema, literature and the visual arts
- To establish a sense of ownership of and belonging to the Center

The center seeks to realize its goals through the provision of a friendly and lively environment which is convenient and stimulating to children and responsive to their needs, while creating an atmosphere of mutual respect, hard-work and sense of belonging among staff, who pay particular attention to developing excellent communication channels with the public in order to constantly listen to their comments and suggestions, improve the Center's services and spread its aims. The center also runs an all-year-around program of events and activities in music, literature, story telling, theatre, information technology, and other fields.

1.4.3 Components of the Center:

The components of the Center are: a library which occupies about half of the center's area is an essential component, where several activities are based; a multi-purpose room equipped to host up to 120 people for musical or theatrical performances, lectures, small conferences, and similar and other activities; a training room allocated for training courses, seminars, lectures, workshops, etc.; a video screening room in which a variety of cultural, educational and recreational films can be shown to up to 40 children; a study area, which provides a convenient learning environment; an art gallery, used to exhibit children's art works as well as to exhibit works by local and international artists; an IT/ computer lab, equipped with workstations for IT training;

two open-air courtyards inside the building which can accommodate between 30 to 40 children each, and provide a venue for different activities. Children can also converse and relax in these spaces without disturbing readers in the library.

1.4.4 Services of the Center:

1) The Library: holds more than 90,000 library materials in all areas of culture, general knowledge, science and entertainment. These materials are in various formats and media. They include books, encyclopedias, guidebooks, atlases, CDs, DVDs, videos and audiotapes, computer software, and Braille books.

Moreover, the library holds a large number of state-of-the-art computer workstations for research and browsing, including PCs designed for children with special needs. Members have access to free library services including in-library reading, book borrowing, and various other types of information services. Finally, the library offers various activities to encourage reading and the continuing use of its materials.

2) Art Unit: This unit aims to enhance the children's sense of aesthetic appreciation in all fields of plastic art, music and drama, as well as to develop their creative abilities through workshops and courses in the plastic arts, such as drawing, sculpture, painting, decoration, and other genres and in Music and drama, including the production of theatrical and musical performances, paying particular attention to traditional music and dance.

3) Information Technology Unit: The IT Unit runs training courses specifically for improving children's computer literacy. It also provides courses for adults who work with children, including family members.

4) Extended Services Unit: This unit aims to render services to as many children and families as possible outside the center, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas. It does this by the means of a mobile library, external events and activities, visits program, training and voluntary work, and library and information staff training programs.

The activities of the Center are varied in their goal, content, number of children participants, and timing (see appendix 4 & 5). They are held daily, weekly, and monthly basis according to the type of activity. They range from short to long term activities programs. The number of the members of the center reached 8400 members by the end of December 2006, including children under fifteen years, parents, and professionals of the children in general.

In response to the increasing number of children memberships, the center created participation system based on welcoming each child for pre-defined two days (Saturday & Tuesday, Sunday & Wednesday, or Monday & Thursday).

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The ultimate aim of this study is to achieve an understanding of children's and their parents' perception of the activities offered at children cultural centers. Since the study was carried in Palestine, the main purpose it is to find out how children and parents perceive and understand the activities offered by children cultural centers based on their experience of participation at the center's activities delivered outside the school (the traditional and most important setting for the children and their parents). In addition, the study seeks to single out the participants' thoughts about participation in activities since it is voluntary-based, and their perceived impact of these activities on children learning and development, if any.

On the other hand, the researcher aims to produce an academic study at the master level, supported by relevant classical and modern literature that is found relevant for the phenomenon under investigation, to be used for further research, and also for some knowledge about the activities in its context.

1.6 General Statement of the Problem

This study addresses the following main and sub-research questions:

Main research question: How do the children's and parents' perceive the activities offered by a selected child cultural center in Palestine?

Sub-research questions:

- 1) What are the children's and parents' motivation to participate in the activities?
- 2) What are children's and parents' perceived impact of activities offered by children cultural centers on children's learning and development?
- 3) What are the children's and parents' thoughts about the children cultural center as an out-of-school setting?

1.7 Identification of Important Concepts

1.7.1 Activities:

In this study the concept 'activities' refers to the activities offered by children cultural centers, out-of-school, for a group of children (not individual), covering one or more of arenas such as drama, painting, drawing, music, singing, story telling, traditional dance as instrument/s for achievement of the center's goals.

In literature, activities are also called cultural activities, recreational activities, leisure activities, extra-curricular activities (in a school setting), and it is also called "play" as well. I avoided calling them cultural activities since they are not only cultural activities, though some of them are; or recreational activities since they are not only recreational activities, though some are. And I avoided calling them extra-curricular activities as they are not only curricular-based activities, and are not implemented at a school.

Activities can be daily activities, like story telling, drawing, and painting. They can be organized in regular or/and seasonal forms (weekly, monthly, and yearly), and they can be long term, like those with series of activities. The activities can be tailored

according to children's needs and interests, like organized training sessions of advanced skills on drawing, music and dancing, or any other fields of interest.

1.7.2 Animators:

In this study the concept of 'animators' refers to trained staff and/or others who conduct the activities with the children and/or adolescents within the children cultural centers context. Animators have different given names such as (activators, mediators, educators, group leaders, facilitators, care-givers, and professionals), based on the role they play in action, whether it is facilitating, activating, or mediating.

Animators are those mentioned who plan and implement the activities. I call them animators because they play a purposeful role in planning and carrying out activities. The concept stems from the word "animation" where cartoon films evolve from an idea to a text to a complete story which attracts children in all over the world.

1.7.3 Participants and Participation

'Participants' in this study refer to the selected among children themselves, who are active members of the child cultural center and participates in its activities.

'Participation' in this study refers to the children's participation in activities at the child cultural center for 1-2 times a week in regular basis, or more in irregular basis.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

1.8.1 Organization of the chapters

This thesis consists of five chapters; chapter one deals with the background information of the study, the country profile, the children and their life and education, the study purpose, main and sub-questions, and identification of important concepts related to the study. Chapter two provides the literature review relevant to the study. Chapter three describes issues of the methodology of the study, such as approach and

design, population and sampling, criteria for selection, data collection, data analysis, validity, and limitations and challenges encountered. Data analysis and presentation in chapter four, while chapter five presents the discussion, conclusion, implications for further studies, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. It reflects the main dimensions of the study focus; the contextual understanding of children cultural centers and learning environment within the offered activities including the presence of the adult (animator), and peers as facilitators of learning and development, and its connection to classical and modern theories.

The following are relevant theories to this study; Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, Feuestein's Mediated Learning Experience. In addition to highlighting relevant literature related to interaction and communication, motivation, psychosocial and emotional wellbeing, frame factors, and enriching and cooperative learning environment.

2.2 The Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective (1977) has highly contributed to understand the importance of interaction between the child and the social environment, and that has a considerable effect on developing child's abilities, realizing his/her potentials, and feelings of competence. Bronfenbrenner believes that the child development is an outcome of the evolving process of the child-environment interactive relationship. He has defined the ecology theory of human development as:

“the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, through the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives; this process is affected by relations obtained within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the setting are embedded” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 514)

Bronfenbrenner in his definition has stressed on three main features:

- 1) The developing person is viewed as a growing and dynamic entity that progressively moves into and structures the milieu in which it resides.
- 2) Environment exerts its influence in a process of mutual accommodation. The interaction between the person and environment is two-directional, which is, characterized by *reciprocity*.
- 3) "The environment defined as relevant to developmental process is not limited to a single immediate setting, but is extended to incorporated interconnections between such settings, as well as to external influences emanating from the larger surroundings". (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:22)

Bronfenbrenner argues that interaction between the individual and his or her social environment is manifested by the multiple-involvement of the different settings (home, school, peers, and children cultural centers). He views child development in multi setting that he/she is exposed to, like school and community centers.

Bronfenbrenner stressed on the interaction of a changing organism in a changing environment. He views the environment as composed of one's immediate settings as well as the social and cultural contexts of relations among different settings.

Furthermore, he stressed that the person and the settings are mutually involved; elsewhere individuals are treated as products of their immediate setting and "larger" context (Rogoff, 2003).

Since Bronfenbrenner based his theory on the interaction between the child and the surrounding environment, i.e. "settings" on human development, he emphasized his ecological constructs on different interacting systems. They are: Microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Microsystem: Bronfenbrenner defined *Microsystem* as "the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (e.g., home, school, cultural center, etc)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:514).

Home, school, and children cultural centers formulate a triangle of offering the formal and informal learning experiences to the developing child in a setting containing the

interaction between the child and the adults (parents at home, teachers at school, and animators and peers at the children cultural center) since Bronfenbrenner indicated that it is these face-to-face interactions between the child and the significant persons (adults and peers) are most influential in shaping the child's socio-emotional development from one hand, and interaction between the three settings involved in the child development and learning, on the other hand.

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics"
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979:22)

Mesosystem: "A *mesosystem* comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:515). It is formed or extended whenever the developing person moves into new setting, since this system is more focused in the interaction among two or more settings. A *mesosystem* consists of connections and linkage between the different settings in the *microsystem* in which a child plays an active role. An example of *mesosystem* in this study is the relations center and the child's home and school have among them.

Exosystem: refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but rather to settings where the circumstances have an indirect impact on the developing person. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study the concept refers to the understanding of the center's activities as an out-of-school setting, and how it could contribute to the child development indirectly. For instance, the exosystem is related to the socio-economic status of the parents where participants have free-of-charge participation in the Center's activities.

Macrosystem: "refers to over arching institutional patterns of the culture or subcultures, such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which micro, meso and exosystems are the concrete manifestations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:515). These *macrosystems* may exist in explicit form like laws and rules.

Chronosystem: is concerned with the cultural and historical changes that transform the person, process and contextual variables. The cultural and historical features of the Palestinian community since the forced immigration and its effect on the formulations of conceptions related to education, learning, and development.

The child requires participation in progressively more complex reciprocal activities on a regular basis over and extended period in the child's life, with one or more persons with whom a child develops strong, mutual, emotional attachment in order to develop the child's intellectual, emotional, social, and moral aspects of wellbeing and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The child's participation in progressive interaction patterns enhances his or her responsiveness to other features of the immediate physical and social environment that invites exploration, elaboration and imagination in which such activities, in turn, accelerate the child's psychological growth. It is of importance to this study the presence of the adult (animator) who supports, encourages, respects, and expresses admiration and appreciation, and who cares and engages participants in joint activity. Also, the presence of the setting (the center) and the interaction between the Center and the child's home and school is not of less importance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

2.3 Vygotsky's Social-Constructionist Theory

Vygotsky provided a useful framework of thinking about the integrated, dynamic nature of individual, culture and development. He associates cognitive development to the individual's social interaction within the environment, emphasizing that social interaction as a medium in which the child develops, with special emphasis on the leading role of the *microsystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) or specific socio-cultural environment in presence of more mature person and peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Children cultural centers activities, animators, and peers are looked upon as part of a meaningful environment to an individual learner, so as to tempt or motivate the child's learning and development.

Vygotsky in Dixon-Krauss (1996) perceives the adult role (animator) as that of mediating the child's learning activity while sharing knowledge and meaning through social interaction. Vygotsky argues that children learn to use the tools for thinking provided by culture through their interactions with more skilled partners (animators, peers) in the zone of proximal development in complex thinking that makes use of cultural tools of thoughts. Children, thus, become able to carry out such thinking independently, transforming the cultural tools of thoughts to their own purposes. Interaction in the zone of proximal development allows children to participate in activities that would be impossible for them alone (Rogoff, 2003). According to Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development is defined as:

"It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978:86)

One of the most important elements related to the Zone of Proximal Development, according to Vygotsky, is the imitation in learning. Children can imitate a variety of actions that go well beyond their capabilities. By using imitation, children become more capable of doing much more in collective activities with peers or/and under the guidance of adult/s. Vygotsky argues that learning and development of the child are unfold of the Zone of Proximal Development with the help of parents, teacher, animators, peers, and thus the environment in which they exist, making high psychological functions possible, and once they become internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement (Vygotsky, 1978:90).

The concept "scaffolding" was developed by Wood, Bruner, & Ross (Sehic, et. al. 2005). The post Vygotskians developed mediated concepts like scaffolding and apprenticeship. Others view Vygotsky's work on the Zone of Proximal Development that contains assisted construction and scaffolding (Chaiklin, 2003) as structured and systematic assistance in the Zone of Proximal Development through social interaction between an animator and a child.

Sehic et. al. (2005) stresses the role of adult to be pleasant, warm and responsive when working with the children. She further argues that effective scaffolding shows three components that are critical to success: 1) involvement of the children in interesting and meaningful collaborative problem-solving activities, 2) intersubjectivity, and 3) emotional overtone of interaction. The overall goal of scaffolding is to keep children working on tasks in their zones of proximal development, and to foster children's self-regulation.

Along with Vygotsky's theory the human mediator's function is to carry the signs, symbols, and meanings in the child's development processes. Vygotsky (1978) argues that social relationships (among child, animator, and peers) are primary and that the individuality is secondary phenomenon in the social and cognitive development of an individual. Vygotsky was interested in the process of learning and development rather than the end result. He considers the child's strength rather than weaknesses. To him, the process (learning and mediating) justifies the end. In the context of the activities offered by the Palestinian children cultural centers; this study will focus on the role of the adult animators as helpers for the children to be involved in reciprocal social interaction in a group, and who can identify their interest and concerns, and work on developing them from the point where they are in a fully socially interactive manner as a scaffold.

2.4 Feuestein's Mediated Learning Experience

The theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) was developed by Reuven Feuestein who defined his theory as: "an interaction of the organism with its environment via a human mediator" (Feuestein and Feuestein, 1991:3). Based on the definition, Feuestein focused his theory on the interaction between the human beings and its socio-cultural environment. According to Feuestein's theory, he defines human mediation as a conscious attempt of an adult to adjust his/her behaviour and modify the environment in a way that will ensure that the child can benefit from it, that is, focus on it, perceive, understand and respond.

Mediated Learning Experience is a way in which stimuli emitted by the environment are transformed by a "mediating agent". This mediating agent is guided by his intentions, cultural, and emotional investment, and it selects and organizes the world of stimuli to the child (Feuestein, Rand, Hoffman & Miller, 1980). Feuestein defined the (MLE) as:

"a quality of interaction between the organism and its environment. This quality ensured by the interposition of an initiated intentional human being who mediates the stimuli impinging on the organism" (Feuestein and Feuestein, 1991:7)

Feuestein found that children who were exposed to new cultures (culturally different) produced a high level of learning capacity, while findings were contrasted to the children who were not directly exposed to stimuli in their culture (culturally deprived). According to Feuestein, culturally deprived children need to learn how to learn through mediation.

"The culturally deprived individual is the one who, either not having been exposed to mediated learning experience, is devoid from learning tools, habits, dispositions, and propensities to learn. His "modifiability" (i.e. his capacity to benefit from formal and informal learning) is more or less restricted" (Feuestein & Feuestein, 1991:51).

Feuestein argues that Mediated Learning Experience offers a seminal contribution to the child's formal and informal learning and development, especially in the enrichment programs for children in risk situation through a mediated agent. The mediator's role is selecting, framing and modifying the stimuli before it gets to the child which will help him respond in a more competent manner (Feuestein and Feuestein, 1991). That applies to the role of animators in organising and planning the activities for the children. The modality becomes powerful source in changing the child's cognitive and emotional functioning since the child being immersed in reacting to impinging stimuli. He further argues that wealth and diversity of stimuli, their content and intensity, and frequency of exposure can, to high extent, influence the restructuring of the child's cognitive functioning. This is referred to as incidental learning process leading to establishing permanent behavioural changes, where Feuestein argues that direct exposure to stimuli will provide the child with varied experiences of perceptual, cognitive, and emotional characters.

In the process of the mediator (animators) interaction, coaching, and facilitating the children discovery and learning, according to Feuestein theory of (MLE), there are twelve points or parameters to describe the quality of the mediated learning experience interaction, such as: intentionality and Reciprocity (Focusing), transcendence, mediation of meaning, mediation of regulation and control of behaviour, and mediated feelings of competence (rewarding). The other parameters are considered as reinforcing parameters since they are more culturally and individually related to the individual's motivation, needs system, type of skills mastered and the structure of knowledge. Feuestein highlighted that:

*"As a source of flexibility and plasticity, MLE is therefore related neither to the language of a particular culture nor to its specific contents but rather to the **quality** of interaction which is manifested by MLE" (Feuestein & Feuestein, 1991:17).*

2.5 Social Interaction and Communication

As Bronfenbrenner focuses on the different areas of the children's development in contexts, Vygotsky took one more step and focus on how the context is important for the children's learning and development in their Zone of Proximal Development in the presence of the mediator "scaffold", while Feuestein elaborated more about interaction between mediator and learning. The three above theories are of importance for this study since they illustrate the children learning and development through socio-cultural context, which can be applicable to the children cultural centers as an arena for interaction with the whole surroundings.

Much emphasis has been put on the importance of interaction and communication in social and learning contexts. The awareness of the importance of interaction and communication (not only the language) as a basis for all learning and the utilization of a holistic and a resource-oriented approach becomes prevalent (Skjørten, 2001). In accordance with Reggio Emilia approach concerning the learning environment should be designed to promote major humanistic traits of human to human interaction. The same approach emphasizes on seating system which affects to a great extent the social interaction between the peers themselves and the adult (Gandini, 2002). Moreover,

the children are eager and motivated intrinsically for interaction and communication. Skjørten (2001; 2007) underlined the importance of cultural activities in promoting interaction and communication and thereby also promoting learning and emotional and social growth and participation within both formal and informal education, especially for marginalized children based on the assumption that interaction and communication are important foundation for education, learning and development.

Johnsen (2001) considered interaction and communication as central aspects in her Curriculum Relation Model (CRM). She considered them as basic elements in creating a good learning environment. The same was emphasized in Rye's International Child Development Program (ICDP), in which he identifies a number of qualities that comprise interaction. The basic quality of this program rests on eight guiding principles that may be looked upon as a tool for the adult educator (animator) in developing good relationship with the children, and among the children themselves. This interaction will improve the learning environment due to the improvement of the quality of interaction. The eight guiding principles are:

	Adult-Child Interaction	Child-Child Interaction
1	Demonstrate positive feelings	Demonstrate positive feelings
2	Adapt to the children	Help the children adjust to one another
3	Talk to the children	Help the children talk about shared experiences
4	Give praise and acknowledgement	Encourage the students to express acceptance, praise, and recognition
5	Help the children focus their attention	Help the children focus their attention on shared activities
6	Give meaning to student's experiences	Help the children share their experiences with each other in a meaningful way
7	Elaborate and explain	Help the children express and explain their experiences and opinions to one another
8	Help the children achieve self-discipline	Help the children achieve self-discipline

Figure (1): The eight guiding principles of Rye's ICDP (2001).

"Interaction is the mutual attention that two (or more) persons have towards each other or towards an object or a third person" Skjørten (2007: 15). Rye (2001) reported that *Authoritative*¹¹ attitudes brought positive results in significant research. He

¹¹ "Authoritative" refers to the adult being a good example for the child, showing clearly his or her understanding, values and standing as reflected in daily life

reported some characteristics of an Authoritative attitude. It communicates perceptions, attitudes, and reactions; shows caring but also firm attitudes in child-rearing; supports and affirms the child's positive behavior and efforts; and places demands that are appropriate to the child's abilities.

Animator-child communication is a basic element in the children cultural centers environment. Johnsen (2001) argues that communication is a skill built on knowledge and human sensitivity. She further stated that "without communication there will be no education, no matter how qualified and relevant the adaptation of content, methods and organization seems to be" (Johnsen, 2001:288-289). Skjørten (2007) pointed that communication is about sharing and interchange of interests, feelings, thoughts, opinions or information.

Guided participation: In learning and development in socio-cultural context children are viewed by Rogoff (1990; 2003) as apprentices in thinking, active in their effort to learn from observing, and participating with peers and more skilled members of their societies (animators). She follows Vygotsky's concept of *Interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development* where children learn through their interaction with more experienced adults and peers, who support the children thinking beyond the zone in which they would be able to perform without assistance. Galileo (1564-1642) stated: "you cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him discover for himself". Rogoff's view of cognitive development is embedded in social relationships and socio-cultural tools and practices. Her frame work stresses on:

- 1- *Children's active role in making use of social guidance.*
- 2- *The importance of tacit and routine arrangements of children's activities and their participation in skilled cultural activities that are not conceived as instructional.*
- 3- *Cultural variation in both the goals of development and the means by which children achieve a shared understanding which those who serve as their guides and companions through explanation, discussion, provision of expert models, joint participation, active observation, and arrangements of children's roles. (Rogoff, 1990:8)*

Guided participation involves the children's and their animator's collaboration process of building bridges from children's current understanding and skills to reach new

ones, and to structure and arrange participation in the activities with dynamic shift in children's responsibilities. Rogoff (1990; 2003) argues that the underlying process of guided participation is *inetrsubjectivitiy*: a sharing of focus and purpose between the children and their more skilled partners (animators) from one hand, and their challenging and exploring peers on the other hand. *Intersubjectivity* is a process of verbal and non verbal communication, and it is a social activity.

2.6 The Children's Needs for Learning and Development

2.6.1 Motivation

Motivation was found appropriate concept in regards to understanding the children and their parents' motivations and willingness to participation of activities of children cultural centers, since it is voluntary and willing-based participation. The will reflected an individual's desire, need, or purpose (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Motivation is considered as basic issue in children inner thinking and practices related to their learning and development. It is what makes us and the children want to go on. Motivation can be defined as the desire to do something or the inspiration that develops because of something particular. Motivation has been described as the factors within a human being or animal that raises and directs goal-oriented behavior (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2002). Piaget (1952) also believed that intellectual activities were not only governed by cognitive abilities alone but that they were also influenced by the interest and motivation (Wadsworth, 1989). Therefore learning and development depends on factors like motivation and interest.

The conceptualization of motivation to the children's learning and development is highly important, since it stresses on the animators' role in arranging the environment so that the children can respond properly to stimuli (behavioral theories). It also puts an emphasis on the child's thoughts, beliefs, and emotions in relation to how the animators can manifest themselves in the social environment (cognitive theories). According to behaviorist theories of Pavlov & Skinner (Crain, 1992), if an activity is

enjoyable, it is more likely to be repeated. This gives an opportunity to justify the making of an activity enjoyable so that it can be repeated. Through this repetition the activity implications are eventually mastered. Behavioral theories view motivation as a change in the rate, frequency of occurrence, form of behavior (response), and as a function of environmental events and stimuli (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Motivation comes in two forms; *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as what causes us to participate in an activity for our own enjoyment (Stipek, 1993). While extrinsic motivation involves the desire to be recognized and acknowledged. It also involves competitive spirit (Stipek, 1993). This goes in line with Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1952), and Rye (2001) who assume that the child is an active actor in the process of development of his/her own experiences and learning, where the child is selecting, organizing, and processing experiences with his/her surroundings. Motivation of the child was considered as affecting factor of cognitive process, since it combines -in a way- the attitudes of general involvement with cognitive tasks that are included academic studies, activities, and real life situations (Feuestein, 1991; Feuestein et. al. 1980).

Since the children are spending substantial time together at the Center in general, and during the activities in particular, it was important to look at the social motivation and its impact on the children's social interaction in the groups. Group motivation operates according to the same principles of individual motivation. But it is peculiar how the task is structured, and how the group members are rewarded. Factors that can optimize group motivation include having a goal to attain; feeling efficacious about performing well; holding positive outcomes expectations; attributing success to such factor as ability, effort, and strategy use; and receiving feedback indicating goal progress (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Self-Regulation: is the process whereby children activate and sustain cognition, behaviors, and affects that are systematically oriented towards attainment of their goals (Zimmerman, 1989). Self-regulation is intimately linked to the children motivation to learning. And it achieved to the extent of adult implicitness with the

child during the interaction (Sehic et. al., 2005), which found of importance for this study on the adult role during activities, and its effect on the child.

2.6.2 Supportive frame factors

Johnsen (2001) argues that although when the child is the center of attention, he/she is also influenced by externally decided frame factors. These factors may determine certain possibilities and limitations to the learning and exploration. Legislation, economy, and professional quality are examples of frame factors which can also be physical, social, and/or cultural. Johnsen further notes that "frame factors set limits and give direction" (Johnsen, 2001:265). Supportive frame factors are important to consider in this study -on the macro and chrono systems- based on the Palestinian context under occupation for 40 years, and -on the microsystem- related to the environmental stimulation of the Center.

2.6.3 Psycho-social and emotional wellbeing

The ongoing violence environment around the children in Palestine, affects their learning and development. Individual responses to traumatic life-threatening events differ from child to child, depending on available support systems around them (Awwad, Dubrow, & Pinek, 1999). The children's core response to trauma consistently includes anxiety, fears, and loss of self-esteem (Awwad, et. al., 1999). Studies show issues that strengthen or weaken resiliency in traumatic stress related to the children themselves, to their parental and family responses, and to their social and cultural surroundings (Punamaki, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2001).

Johnsen (2005) argues that the ideal learning environment should be a safe haven from fighting and oppressive events that create socio-emotional atmosphere that alternatively creates positive strategies against socio-emotional blows. She further noted that the ongoing communication and social interaction between children in learning settings is the arena for socio-emotional support, and the main aim is to

support the children's self-concept, not only crucial in the crisis or violence situations (Johnson, 2005)

Conceptions of the self: *Self* is referring to conceptual system that is made up of one's thoughts and attitudes about oneself (Siegler, Deloache, & Eisenberg, 2006). The development of the self is important because children self-conceptions, including the way they view themselves, influence their overall feelings of wellbeing and competence.

Self-esteem is one's overall evaluation of the self and the feeling engaged by that evaluation (Crocker, 2001). Individuals with low self-esteem usually tend to feel less self-worth (Harter, 1999). Self-esteem is a basic element of self-concept (Maslow, 1970), and it is important because it refers to how children are satisfied about themselves (Siegler et. al., 2006). It is about how good we feel about ourselves and our self-evaluation. Self-actualization that proves motivation (Skjørten, 2001; 2007) can be achieved after fulfillment of physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and cognitive needs (Maslow, 1970), which are considered as motivation to learning and development.

Play: play is a common characteristic of children all around the globe. It is the child's intrinsic motive of learning and exploration. It is mental, physical, social and emotional contact forms where it is important for learning. Block (2000) pointed that activities in *play* may lead the child to explore his/her surroundings, use energies, acquire and practice skills, develop mental and physical qualities. *Enjoyment* is a positive emotional response that is indicated by observable expressions of fun, pleasure, and liking (Sherrill, 2004). *Play* and *enjoyment* are linked directly to the child's *fun* activities.

2.6.4 Enriching and cooperative learning environment

Enrichment is an educational and learning perspective that is built upon the child's existing strengths and recourses within suitable and adapted tasks. It is ability-based

approach based on enabling socialization and interaction, and on creating a social atmosphere/setting that allows such interaction (Befring, 2001). Johnsen (2001) argues that children learn through different strategies, activities, media, and methods, and that knowledge can be brought to children by variety of means. This variation of means and goals can also bring a variety of rich learning experiences, not only for the time being, but also for the future. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) strongly emphasized the necessity of the development of the child's personality as well as abilities mentally, physically to the fullest potential. So, children's addressing the children needs by involving them in child-centered education is vital, as Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 2004) confirms.

The enrichment perspective has special focus on the children's interaction and communication, and in creating a cooperative learning environment among the children. The children will have the opportunity to discover their own strengths and learning potentials as they assist each others to learn and develop, and break away from the competitive peer relationships. Hence, it is based on coexistence in social learning context to receive adequate preparation for adulthood, and experience a sense of respect for cultural and social values, which is relevant to the learning and interactive environment of the Center's activities.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the children's and their parents' perception of activities offered in the environment of a purposefully selected children cultural center. The researcher is inspired by the contribution of the Center for Educational Research and Innovation which states:

"Educational research is therefore not limited to the questions such as: What should the individual learn? What is the individual is going to learn in its environment? Or, what is the individual able to learn if subjected to instructions or training? Educational research should also strive to clarify the learning needs of individuals, what is actually learned in different environments and the complex interpretation between these environments and learning"
(OECD 1995: 23)

Thus, another goal of this study is to use the results of descriptions of children and their parents of the activities learning environment for other setting such as schools and other children cultural centers by highlighting the voice of children and parents in order to model or improve the services for their customers of children, and to contribute to the overall educational development of the society.

The children (children's voice) and their parents represented the first source as informants for this study. The staff of the Center (animators & director) may be regarded as the second group of informants. Dale (1996) pointed out the parents' involvement as follows:

' The parents should be given expert power, for the first time the parents is credited as having and expertise (the knowledge of their own child and family) that is distinct and separate from the professional's expertise' (Dale 1996:12).

This chapter discusses the methodology that is used to carry out this study. It highlights the research approach and design, population and sampling, the procedures of data collection, data analysis and interpretation, validity, ethical consideration, and limitations of the study.

3.2 Approach and Design

3.2.1 Approach

Given the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach is used in order to investigate the children's and their parents' perception of activities offered by children cultural centers.

Gall, Gall & Borg (2003) and Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research in the following ways:

"Qualitative research is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct their social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and these constructions tend to be situational. The methodology consists of discovering the meanings and interpretations by studying cases intensively in their natural settings and by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction."

(Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003).

"Qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of the data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyze them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language"

(Creswell, 1998:14.)

A qualitative approach is used for this study for getting an in-depth perception of the phenomenon under investigation through its informants' concrete experience of the phenomenon (Befring, 2004).

3.2.2 Design

This is a combination of phenomenological study and single case study.

Phenomenological design: Since the study focuses on children's and parents' perception, experiences, and meaning of the studied phenomenon by highlighting their voice and giving emphasis to their expressions about their perception of activities, this has the characteristics of phenomenological study.

According to Creswell (1998): "A phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon".

Furthermore, a phenomenologist explores the structures of consciousness in human

experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989 in Creswell, 1998). Thus, the central focus of phenomenology is on the understanding and experience of the phenomenon. Creswell (1998) noted that phenomenology is the study of how people experience a phenomenon, and information is usually collected through interviews with a small number of informants.

Befring (2004:76) states: "Qualitative method often seeks to define and understand specific circumstances from an overall perspective". This study looks at the uniqueness of the children and their parents' experience of untraditional activities offered in untraditional setting. Informants could have multiple realities rooted in their perspectives, and multiple interpretations of the activities. Creswell (1998) argues that phenomenological studies are designed to describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of it as perceived by people who participated in it, and that subjective experience at the center of inquiry.

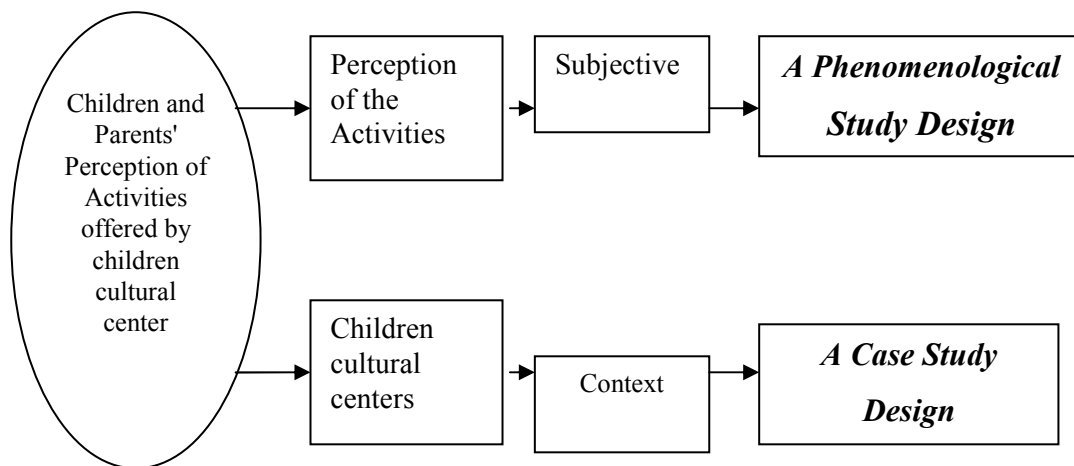


Figure 2: The choice of the research qualitative designs

The research title is divided to two main entities: 1) perception of activities (subjective experience) whereby a phenomenological study is used as the main research design, and 2) child cultural center (context) whereby a single case study design is used.

A single case study design: In order to answer the research questions, particularly related to the center as an out-of school setting; the empirical focus is on one child

cultural center; it is important emphasis on the context. Therefore, a case study design is used to understand the phenomenon of activities within its context. Stake (1995) noted that a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case, coming to understand it within its important circumstances.

According to Robson (1993:5), a case study is, "a strategy for doing research which evolves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidences". Furthermore, Gall, et. al. (2003) argues that qualitative case study enables the researcher to interact with the informants to get deeper understanding of their feeling in their natural situation. In addition, case studies are implemented to answer "how" and "what" questions (Yin, 1994).

In the planning phase of the study, the intention was to select three different children cultural centers in three different areas. However, due to the difficult political and security situation in Gaza Strip at the time of the implementation of the study, it was decided to limit the research to one child cultural center. (for more information see limitation of the study in this chapter).

3.3 Population and Sampling

3.3.1 The study area:

Gaza Strip was chosen to be the area of the study since the researcher lives in Gaza area, where access to the West Bank is, thus, impossible due to general political reasons of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The careful selection of a research site helps to ensure the success of the study (Gall et. al., 2003). One child cultural center is purposefully selected as the case (arena) for the study for the following reasons:

- 1) National, non-profit center.
- 2) Provides high variety of activities.

-
- 3) Serves city and refugees camps (central location).
 - 4) Serves children with and without special needs, including adaptive activities, and physical accessibility.
 - 5) Does not represent religious and/or political affiliations.
 - 6) Quite new center which is in need for an early evaluation of its activities.
 - 7) The researcher has internal knowledge of the center, due to work experience for the center till the start of study in Norway in 2005.

3.3.2 The target population

According to Gall et. al. (2003), it is only when a target population has been identified that a sampling procedures can be instilled. The target population of this study is all the children participating in the center's activities and their parents, the animators, and the director of the center. According to the Customer Data Base of the Center, the total number of the members at the center was 7952 members, by the end of September 2006. This number includes children aged 6-15, parents of children under 6 years, and professionals working with the children.

3.3.3 Sampling

Sampling of children: In order to achieve rich and varied collection of information of the phenomenon under the children interviewee as children pointer to be the main informant of the study. A purposeful sampling was chosen to select information-rich informants who can provide sufficient knowledge of their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation, Creswell (1998: 55) noted that the participants in phenomenological study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who experienced the phenomenon. Therefore, two types of purposeful sampling were used to select the children as follows:

- 1) **Criterion Sampling:** According to Gall, et. al. (2003), the choice of criterion sampling works well with case study design when sampling involves a selection of

cases that most likely information rich, a phenomenological study design when criterion sampling examines participants who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The researcher sets two main criteria for criterion sampling as:

- Children who are registered members at the Center in December, 2005. This criterion is chosen to make sure that children selected for the study have at least 10 months of experience in the activities.
- Children aged 10-12 years, who are the targeted age group for this study.

Therefore, applying the criterion sampling on the Center's Data-Base, the number of the relevant population decreases from 7952 to **308** children aged 10-12 years with 10 months membership (experience of activities).

2) Snowball or Chain sampling: Involves asking central or well-situated person to recommend informants that information-rich (Gall, et. al., 2003; Creswell, 1998). The researcher asks the animators to identify those children who have been participating in different activities in regular form since December 2005, in reference to the list of the **308** children resulted from the criterion sampling. Then the researcher records the highly frequent names identified by the animators, which decrease the number from **308** to **21**. Accordingly, the list of the most repeated names, gathered from different animators, secures a highly credible sample (Gall, et. al., 2003).

3) Criteria matrix: The next step in sampling is adding more variety of the informants' backgrounds. The researcher sets the following criteria for the final selection of the children:

- Living in different areas (city, camp), for securing more socio-economic status characteristics of their backgrounds (low, moderate, and high).
- Gender representation (4 males and 4 females) for ensuring gender equity/diversity.
- Children from different schools (UNRWA, governmental, and private)
- Children with physical impairment (1 male, 1 female), since children with special needs are amongst the customers of the Center.

The last procedure in the process of selection is done in the following way. The 21 names are transferred to a criteria matrix sheet to make balance between the set criteria. 10 children were selected for the study; 2 for the piloting, and 8 for the main data collection.

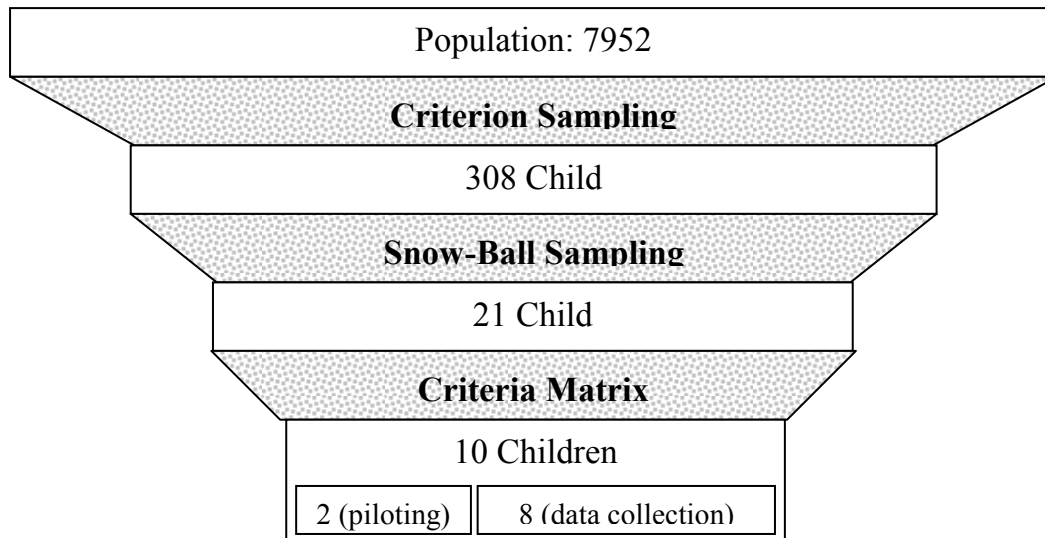


Figure (4): The sampling procedure.

Selection of parents: The selected informants of the children lead to the parents informants. As a result of the diversity of the children's socio-economic status mentioned earlier, parents informants are subject to the same characteristics.

Selection of animators: All the animators working with the children on full time basis at the selected Center are selected to be informants. They are 8 animators who had been working at least for the last 2 years for the center.

3.4 Procedures of Data Collection

3.4.1 Primary permission

The primary permission is gained while designing the study in Oslo during May and June 2006, then it was obtained after the arrival to the field with the letter from the University of Oslo (see appendix 7) and the research proposal.

3.4.2 Informal observation

Since the primary permission is obtained from Center to conduct the study, the researcher starts to implement informal observations of the research site including the activities. These observations help the researcher to get more acquainted with the place, children, activities, and rules in order to understand the site on the one hand, and contributing to the adjustments on the interview guide, on the other.

3.4.3 Pilot study

According to Robson (2000) and Yin (2003), the main purpose of the pilot study is to refine data collection plans with respect to the content and procedures to be followed. Furthermore, it also helps the researcher to identify possible problems in the data collection, as it also supports the researcher in gaining more self-confidence in interviewing the informants of the study. (Robson, 2000:242), stated that:

"You don't become a good interviewer just by reading about it. Skills involved require practice, preferably under low risk conditions where it is possible to receive feedback on your performance"

The pilot study is conducted with two children and their parents whom were selected from the final sample gathered in the criteria matrix. The researcher has five objectives in implementing the pilot study:

- 1) To examine the interview guide in which final refinement can be done before the data collection takes place.
- 2) To examine the informants understanding of the questions raised during the interview, particularly the children informants.
- 3) To gain the necessary confidence needed before conducting the study.
- 4) To examine whom among the informants will be interviewed first (first child and then parents, or first parent and then the child).
- 5) To examine the interview place whether at the Center or at the informants' homes.

At the end of the pilot study lessons are learnt. Children should be interviewed before their parents, making sure that the recording machine is working. Conducting interviews with the informants at the Center than at home, since there have been some disruptions of the interview by others living at home.

4.4.4 Final permission

The final permission to start the data collection is given after submitting the final research proposal and instruments to the Center. The final permission includes also the possibility to interview children and their parents at the Center premises.

3.4.5 Informed consent:

A request letter for participation in the study was sent to the children and their parents (see appendix 8). The purpose of the letter was to explain the nature, focus, and importance of the study, assuring the informants about their rights to participate or not. It was, also, meant to assure privacy and confidentiality of the planned interview as (Gall, et. al., 2003) underlines. The request had been ended by asking about the informants' decision (YES/NO) and where they would like to have the interview (home, Center, or to be specified by the informants). The consent of the parents over doing the interviews was obtained by sending the letters with the children, or, as in some cases, the researcher directly got the consent by contacting the parents by phone.

3.4.6 Data collection:

The data collection started in December 2006 till early January 2007 since the political situation was very instable causing this delay in collecting the final data of the study. Data collection started by conducting interviews with 8 children and their parents in order that each child is interviewed before his/her parents. After all the children and parents interviews were accomplished, the researcher implemented the focus group interview with 6 animators working at the Center, and finally the director of the center gets interviewed.

3.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments Used

Robson (1993) highlighted that qualitative research makes it possible to focus in depth on relatively small samples that are selected purposefully to bring insight and in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews were

used with 8 children (see children's interview guide, appendix 10) and their parents (see parents' interview guide, appendix 12), focus group discussion with the animators (see animators' focus group discussion guide, appendix 14), and the director of the center (see director's interview guide). Consulting documents as supportive to the purpose of the study was also used.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews:

According to Robson (2000), an interview method permits the researcher much greater depth of gathering information than any other method of collecting data. Therefore, the semi-structured interviews are used as main data collection method for gaining the informants' interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Kvale (1996:105) stated that:

"Interviews are particularly suited for studying people understanding of meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences, understanding, clarifying and elaborating their own perspectives on their lived world"

Interviews are considered one of the main data collections methods in qualitative case study research (Gall, et al, 2003); while it is the only method in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1998). Since the interview method applies for the purpose of the study, in the first place, and applies to the characteristics of the two designs used (case study, and phenomenological study), the main data collection was interviewing children and parents informants using semi-structured interview guide. The interview guides were developed to address the research main questions and sub-questions of the study. The interview guides went through different stages of revision and development especially after conducting the informal observations of the Center's activities, site, and the piloting stage.

3.5.2 Focus group

One focus group interview, *discussion*, was held with 6 animators working with the children at the Center. The purpose was to collect reflections of the animators on the main data gathered from the children and their parents. That is why individual

interviewing with each animator was avoided. According to Krueger, (1994), Morgan, (1998), Stewart & Shamdasni, (1990) in Creswell (1998), focus groups procedure is advantageous when the interaction among the interviewees is likely to yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, and when individuals interviewed may be hesitant to provide information.

3.5.3 Consulting documents

Different policy documents, annual reports, strategic plan, brochures and all the activities calendars, and recent survey results were gathered from the center to be used both for the understanding of the contextual aspects, and partially for data presentation, and mainly for the discussion and description of the Center.

3.6 Analysis and Interpretation

The data obtained from interviewing the children and their parents, the animators, and the director, went through a thorough process of analysis and interpretation as follows:

- a) Transcribing:** the recorded interviews on paper text.
- b) Re-check:** after transcription was done, the researcher re-listens to the interviews and compared it to the transcribed text to make sure that each single word was there on the text. By doing so, it was also possible to identify the informants' emotional status in the different stages of the interview.
- c) Coding:** all the informants were given special code to refer to. The children were given (ch-#) code, the parents were given (pa-#) code, the animators were given (ant-#) code, and the director was given director code.
- d) Readings of the text:** many careful readings of the text were done; first reading of each child's and his/her parent's interview text, second reading of all children's interviews texts and all parents' interviews texts, and finally, reading the animators' and director's interview texts.

e) Single data breaking into segments: The work on each category was done separately from other categories. When a category was identified, relevant transcribed texts were referred to. This made it possible to identify sub-categories. Next step was giving each sub-category a color. Furthermore, each single statement with particular relevance was highlighted by a particular color, in each sub-category.

f) Emptying the category and sub-categories to the working sheet: each category and its sub-categories were emptied into a separate working sheet (see figure 4). The sheet was developed to give both specific and general picture of the responses related to the category and its sub-categories on one hand, and to see clearly the similarities and differences between the 8 children informants, the 8 parent informants, and the similarities and differences between both groups. This provided the opportunity to read the information from different angles, which made it easy for data analysis.

	SC*: A	SC: B	SC: C		SC: A	SC: B	SC: C
Child-1				Parent-1			
Child-2				Parent-2			
Child-3				Parent-3			
Child-4				Parent-4			
Child-5				Parent-5			
Child-6				Parent-6			
Child-7				Parent-7			
Child-8				Parent-8			

Figure (4): Data analysis working sheet

SC* = Sub-category

g) Animators and director: some parts of the data gathered from the animators and the director was used for confirmations and reflections on some of the categories, since the main informants for the study are the children and their parents in the first place.

3.7 Validity

Measures taken to ensure validity:

1) Operationalization of concept into instruments: the researcher has refined the instruments many times by himself, with local and main advisors, and with other

professionals, in addition to the input of the literature, pilot study, and in-formal observations.

2) Triangulation: the use of triangulation of designs (case study and phenomenological study), triangulation of methods (Interviews, focus group, consulting documents), triangulation of informants (children, parents, animators, and the director), and triangulation of theories.

3) Sampling: the choice of purposeful sampling (criterion & snowball) followed by criteria matrix to enrich the validity aspects of the sample.

4) Voice of the informants: the researcher's main interest was the voice of the informants to increase and secure an informant-centered representation.

5) Recording interviews: the researcher recorded the entire interviews with all the informants which were transcribed later into written text.

6) Quotations: the researcher used several of the informants' quotations, and carefully presented balanced quotations from all the children and parents informants in order to increase the informant-voice validity.

7) Translation of instruments: the translation of the instruments to informants' mother tongue (Arabic) was given much attention, due to the fact that Arabic has colloquial and formal classical forms. So, interviews were colloquial-based translated into the formal classical Arabic language.

8) Choice of time: the researcher's choice of time to collect the data was important in line with politically safe-situation times to collect the data, avoiding days with general tension because of security problems around.

9) Demanding the truth: in every interview with all the informants, the researcher demanded the truth and only the truth from the different informants, to avoid any bias.

10) Affirming the responses: it was demonstrated by re-asking the informants for validation (i.e.: since children and parents described positive out-comes of the activities impact on the children's development, the researcher asked the informants again if those out-comes were result of something else rather than the activities)

3.8 Ethical Consideration

The awareness of ethical considerations protects the accurate and transparent progression and research professionalism once the researcher is aware of it. Gall et. al. (2003:65) states that:

"It is also of paramount importance that educational researchers respect the right of privacy, dignity, and sensitivities of their research populations and also the integrity of the institutions, within which research occurs"

Ethical considerations were taken into account in the different stages of carrying out this study. These considerations were identified as follows:

1) Personal bias: the researcher himself being a former staff member (since 2001 before it the Center was opened to the public) should ethically be clarified. The main positive thing that the researcher left to Oslo in August 2005, and the center was opened to the public in September 2005. Therefore, going back to the research field, the researcher was not known to the informants (children and parents) as a former Center's staff member, in spite of the fact that the Center staff profile on its homepage¹². Being a former staff member at the Center makes it necessary to be careful, in all the stages of the study, for the sake of precision, honesty, and transparency reasons.

¹² <http://www.qattanfoundation.org/qcc/subpage/en/index.asp?Section3ID=&Section2ID=69&SectionID=60>

2) Privacy and confidentiality: both privacy and confidentiality of all the informants of the study was taken into consideration especially that all the transcribed interviews were immediately given codes, and excluding the names of the interviewees.

3) Informed consent: Full freedom was given to the informants to accept/reject being involved in the study bound with confidentiality and privacy.

4) Gender and culture: being part of and aware of the culture and traditions of the society, the researcher gave the informants the possibility to choose the place of the interviews. In some instances, the researcher was accompanied with a female when interviews were held at informants' homes where they would not welcome a male researcher alone.

3.9 Limitations and Challenges

Limitations related to the study

- The main limitation to this study is due to the site of the study. The Center is not similar to other children cultural centers in general, in terms of the premises (facilities, design, and equipment), in spite of the fact that activities and animators would be generalized to other contexts.
- Interviewing children who have participated for more than 10 months, which can be different from other children's experiences for longer or shorter periods if time.
- The selection of children between 10 and 12 years of age would not reflect all other age groups participating in the activities.

Challenges related to unstable political situation

The main limitations and challenges encountered in the process of this study come from the political situation in the area, which was manifested in the following:

- **Denied access to the field:** when the researcher traveled for the field work from Oslo to Palestine in the end of June 2006, the border to Gaza Strip was closed by

the Israelis authorities, which led to three weeks of waiting at the Egyptian side of the borders before being able to cross to Gaza Strip.

- **Life-threatening conditions:** The population of Gaza Strip, including the informants and the researcher were encountered by security challenges, especially the Israeli incursions to different areas of the Gaza Strip, which was combined with bombing and shooting for days and nights.
- **Destruction of power supply and roads:** since the power plants were bombed in the end of June 2006, by Israelis air-strikes, together with bombing all of the 5 bridges across Gaza Valley between the researcher's residence and the Center of the study, mobility restrictions increased.
- **Disruption of local advisors meetings:** It was not easy to maintain ordinary contact with the local supervisors due to air-strikes in Gaza city which is the meeting place and the location of the Center itself. So, the meetings were postponed or/and disrupted several times.
- **Delays of conducting the data collection:** It was down to vulnerable situation that interviews plans were disrupted.
- **Denied access to West Bank:** The study happened to be confined to Gaza Strip due to impossibility of access to the west Bank where the study could have been expanded or/and compared with the West Bank context.
- **Stress:** the above limitations and challenges were causing continues anxiety and stress for the researcher, since it was uneasy to implement study within the time frame allocated.

Practical challenges:

- **Interviewing Children:** Interviewing children was not an easy job especially with shy and un-out spoken children. Therefore some time was used to establish rapport, explain, brief on the study, and avoided prizing the children since it would be ethically sensitive. Further explanation and simplification of the questions was provided when need.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Findings

This chapter includes the data collected from children, parents, animators, and director of a selected children cultural center in Gaza. The responses related to the perception of the phenomena were gathered through interviewing 8 children and their parents separately, focus group discussion with 6 animators working with the children at the Center, interview with the director of the center, and consulting the documents of the Center. Data was collected in accordance with the research main and sub-questions, as follows:

Main research question:

- 1) How do the children's and parents' perceive the activities offered by a selected child cultural center in Palestine?

Sub-research questions:

- 4) What are the children's and parents' motivation to participate in the activities?
- 5) What are children's and parents' perceived impact of activities offered by children cultural centers on children's learning and development?
- 6) What are the children's and parents' thoughts about the children cultural center as an out-of-school setting?

The researcher used four interview guides to collect information from the different groups of informants. The responses to questions asked have often exceeded what the asked question requires.

The findings are divided into the following categories; background information (children, parents, and animators), perceived expectations from the Center's activities, perception of activities and motivation to participation, children-parent relationship related to activities, perceived impacts of activities on learning and development, and the Center as an out-of-school setting.

4.1 Background Information:

Background information of the concerned cultural center of the child was explained in chapter 1, while in chapter 4, background information of the children and their parents are to be presented. This category was addressed by questions of the children's and the parents' interview guides.

4.1.1 Background information of the children:

The 8 purposefully sampled children of this study represent the different characteristics of the selecting procedures described in chapter 3. Their ages vary from 10 to 12 years, gender is equally represented (4 females, 4 males), they attended 5th to 7th grades at different schools (governmental, UNRWA, and private), and they come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Two of the children have physical impairments; representing the children with special needs who attend the center's activities (ch-3¹³, and ch-4¹⁴). For the purpose of data analysis, children were given codes as follows:

Child No.	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5	Child 6	Child 7	Child 8
Code	ch-1	ch-2	ch-3	Ch-4	ch-5	ch-6	ch-7	ch-8

Table (3): Children codes

To facilitate reading of the data as it is represented by the informants, female children informants were given even numbers (ch-2, ch-4, ch-6, ch-8), and male children were given odd numbers (ch-1, ch-3, ch-5, ch-7).

	Gender	Age	School Type	School Grade
ch-1	Male	10	Governmental	5 th
ch-2	Female	10	Governmental	5 th
ch-3	Male	11	Governmental	6 th
ch-4	Female	12	UNRWA	7 th
ch-5	Male	11	Private	6 th
ch-6	Female	11	Private	6 th
ch-7	Male	12	UNRWA	7 th
ch-8	Female	12	Governmental	7 th

Table (4): Children background information.

¹³ He has paraplegia (paralysis of the lower limbs), and uses wheelchair for mobility.

¹⁴ She has sever spinal cord deformities (Kyphosis and Scoliosis of the back).

4.1.2 Background information of the parents:

The parents are the mothers and/or fathers of the children informants. The parents were given codes for the presentation of the data as follows:

Child No.	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5	Child 6	Child 7	Child 8
Code	pa-1	pa-2	pa-3	pa-4	Pa-5	pa-6	pa-7	pa-8

Table (5): Parents codes

The age of parents varied between 33 to 64 years, with different educational, professional, and socio-economic backgrounds. A summery of the parents' background information is described below:

	Age		Education		Profession	
	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>
pa-1	43	36	Bachelor	Diploma	Business	Housekeeper
pa-2	48	35	Diploma	Master	Employee	Employee
pa-3	64	42	Illiterate	Secondary	Unemployed	Housekeeper
pa-4	53	42	Elementary	Secondary	Worker	Housekeeper
pa-5	38	33	Master	Secondary	Development	Housekeeper
pa-6	43	38	Bachelor	Bachelor	Employee	Housekeeper
pa-7	52	44	Bachelor	Diploma	Business	Employee
pa-8	43	34	Preparatory	Secondary	Business	Housekeeper

Table (6): Parents background information of.

Table (7) shows the relationship between the selected children to their parents who got interviewed.

Children	ch-1	Ch-2	Ch-3	ch-4	ch-5	ch-6	ch-7	ch-8
Father			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

Table (7): Parents participation in the interview.

4.1.3 Background information of the animators and director:

There were 6 animators attending the focus group discussion out of 8 animators working with the children at the center in full time basis for at least 2 years. The focus group discussion was held at the Center, in one long interview with them. The animators interviewed were 2 males, and 4 females, ages varied between 24 to 37 years. They had different educational backgrounds (education, special needs education, information technology, administration, and psychology).

The animators also were coded for data analysis and presentation. Their reflections will be used when necessary. The animators codes are **ant-(#)** where it starts from 1 till 6 (ant-1, ant-2, ant-3, ant-4, ant-5, and ant-6). The Director of the center is given (director) code which will be used in the quotations.

4.2 Perceived Expectations from the Center's Activities

This category deals with the pre-participation in the Center's activities of the children and parents understanding, expectations and early motivation to become members of the Center and partake the different activities offered.

4.2.1 Source of information about the Center's activities

Most of the children reported that they got to know about the Center's activities through friends (5 of 8), which was also affirmed by their parents. The second source of information was the school and the children's mothers. Schools have organized visits with the children to the Center, where they participated in activities.

School excursions¹⁵ are considered to be very limited in the Palestinian school system. Therefore, these visits to the Center reflect a growing interest for schools to the services provided for the children at the Center. According to the Annual Report of the Center (2007), 123 Schools and 106 kindergartens has visited the center from April 2006 till March 2007.

4.2.2 Earlier motivation for participation

The children and parents have reported different reasons for participation in the Center's activities; the children reported that they become members at the Center to:

- Receive activities and recreation, and free reading time (ch-1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8).
- Develop their painting and drawing hobbies (ch-2, 3).

¹⁵ Schools in Gaza are encouraged by the Ministry of Education to organize one school excursion once a year.

-
- Meet people and to know better what this place is about (ch-4, 6).
 - Benefit from the different activities offered (ch-3, 4, 7, 8).
 - Gain some computer literacy (ch-3).

Their parents interpret their motivation to their children's participation as:

- Offering their children useful leisure time at the Center (pa-1, 2, 4, 8).
- Giving opportunity to the development of recreation and hobbies (pa-2, 3, 6).
- Meeting new people and interacting with the community (pa-2, 6).
- Gaining more information and knowledge (pa-3).
- Responding to their children's desire to participate (pa-7, 8).

One of the parents expressed his view in the following way:

"The main reason to allow my child to participate is the Center's neutralism, professionalism, external design, internal order, and variety of activities" (pa-4)

To sum up, the information shows that the children's reasons and motivation for becoming members of the Center were recreation and learning; while parents view the useful leisure time in a healthy setting was their main motive for allowing their children to participate.

4.3 Perception of Activities and Motivation to Participation

Children's perception and interpretation of the activities match their motivation to participate in the activities themselves. Therefore, this category answers the main research question as well as the first sub-question since they were inter-connected in the view of informants. The following is a description of children's and their parents' responses related to their perceived understanding and motivation based on their experiences with the activities after they had been engaged in them for more than 10 months, in addition to the responses of animators and the director.

The information was categorized in accordance with the main topics below:
recreation aspects, education and learning enrichment, relationship between animators

and the children, interaction and communication, aspects of the activities, child-parent relationship related to activities, and limitation to participation in activities.

The description below represents not only the dimensions of the most frequent responses of the activities, but also it presents the prevalence of these responses, as recorded, starting with the most common to less common responses.

4.3.1 Recreational aspects

All the children stated clearly that they perceive activities to be recreational. They described the recreation aspects of the activities as play and fun, and that most of the activities started with recreation games and play. They described recreation as the main difference between the activities at the Center and the school. One child stated it this way:

"I wish that my school would provide recreation as the Center does" (ch-4)

Children also described the activities as use of their leisure time (ch-1, 2, 4, 7).

The animators and the director also affirmed the recreational and play elements of the activities. An animator referred to the aspect saying:

"We implement the activities through the fun and play to enable the child to acquire knowledge and skills, the children participates in the activities because they want to play and to be themselves outside the frame, the school, the house, and the orders" (ant-3)

4.3.2 Education and learning¹⁶ enrichment

All of the children and their parents described the activities as educational and/or learning activities. They affirmed that the activities are about enriching the child's knowledge, culture, talents, mastery, and skills.

"I did not know how to make the loom, I participated in Loom-making course, I learnt how to make it, but I also learnt the history of loom, and how our ancestors used to make it" (ch-3)

¹⁶ Education and learning means the same word in Arabic language. Therefore, I studied the informants' descriptions in order to understand whether it was learning or education based statements.

Educational aspects were indicated through reflecting on the relationship between the activities and its support to the school achievement, while leaning aspects were indicated by children's acquisition of different skills, interaction and communication, in addition to being child-development based activities.

The children affirmed that the information they learnt from the activities are beneficial for school and home. Three children (ch-3, 6, 7) reported that it is also useful for the future. All the children reported that the activities are about learning new skills. Their responses varied regarding what skills they have acquired, since they participated in different activities.

Animators also signified the educational/learning aspects of the activities.

"We are aware that activities have effect on the school academic learning; at the activities the children acquire cultural knowledge which serves their academic knowledge. In addition, activities expand the horizons of knowledge, which will reflect on the children school performance, and lead to higher self-confidence" (ant-6)

4.3.3 Relationship between animators and the children

All the children reported and described the two-way positive relationship with the animators. The most common theme used by the children was love and respect. The children elaborated more on this relationship as they described that animators as part of their motivation to participation, and as a part of their happiness during the activities. They reported also the various aspects of their relationship to the animators, describing how close the animators are to them and eager to interact with them (ch-1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8), how they have the sense for play and humor (ch-1, 4, 8), and that animators give constant support to them (ch-5, 6, 8).

"I feel the animators are close to me, have a sense of humor, are ready to make us happy, and each has rich experience that I want to learn from them. They give me a sense of importance as if my demands and services are the most important to them" (ch-8)

The children's use of the vocabulary to describe the animators reflects also the nature of their understanding of them. The children use¹⁷ activators, group leaders,

¹⁷ The vocabularies used are translated from Arabic language using Arabic-English dictionary.

supervisors, staff, and uncle/aunt. One child (ch-4) uses teacher in one of the statements.

"My relationship with the animators is good because they are good to me, I feel that I have a mutual respect and emotional link with them, and they appreciate me" (ch-4)

Though the children described the animators using positive expressions, it was also observed that two children (ch-3, 7) used expressions like; "they don't beat us", "they don't scream or yell at us".

All the parents reported that they hear positive descriptions about the animators from their children, as they also affirmed the importance of the animators to their children. Parents described the relation between their children and the animators using the terms of love and respect, and described that the animators are eager to answer their children's questions and concerns.

"My child tells me a lot about the animators, her relation to them, how they advice, guide, and deal with her. I think she is interested in the activities because the animators are close to the children, which provides comfort in participation, and allows freedom of inner expression without any limitations" (pa-6)

Furthermore, parents describe the animator's role within the process of the activities. One parent stated that:

"The importance thing that what ever my child does in the activities-even it was so little and simple- he receives thanks and appreciation which encourages him and left his morals" (pa-3)

Animators during the activities: the children also explained the role of the animators during activities; which start with presentation of the children in a playful way. They demonstrate the activities tasks, and they appreciate and praise the children at the end.

"The animator explains what we are going to do in the activity, then we do it slowly while he/she is making us to laugh" (ch-1)

Another child stated:

"We sit in a circle, we play and introduce each others, the animator demonstrates (models) the task in front of us, and we make the same as he/she does" (ch-3)

4.3.4 Interaction and communication

One of the most frequent children's descriptions is social interaction and communication as one of the basic elements of the activities. They pointed out that this was one of the basic motivators to participate in the activities.

"I can draw at home, but I like to come to the drawing activities because they take place in a group, everybody asks and answers, and I talk with the children and the animator" (ch-6)

The animators and the director also continued with this:

"The activities are about social interaction in a context of children" (ant-4)

4.3.5 Aspects of the activities

Children's feelings during the activities: All the children reported that they feel happy during their participation in the activities. In addition, other children reported that they feel comfortable (ch-4, 7, 8), free (ch-3, 8), able to express themselves (ch-1, 7), and feeling free to take initiatives (ch-8). Parents reported that their children come back home from the center with happy feeling each time. They also reported that their children usually come and tell them what they did in the activities. They also described their children's emotional status as happiness above all, and a sense of pride of what they did at the Center.

The building: Most of the children and their parents mentioned the frame factors of the Center. As described in chapter one, the Center is located in a nice building, they mentioned the colors, furniture, environment, availability of materials, availability of enough activity rooms and corners, and physical characteristics such as quiet and clean. Children (ch-5, 7) also pointed out that activities are free of charge, except the courses which are cheap and guaranteed affordable to all family groups.

"One of the most exciting things is the integration of the Center's physical elements like the building, comfort, quietness, and peace and personal qualities of the animators" (pa-2)

"Special attention was given to the construction of the building, colors, variety of activities, services, and the staff" (director)

Freedom and voluntary participation: All the children and parents stated that a main characteristic of the activities is the child-based decision making and freedom. It is based on the child's willingness to participate, on the one hand, and on the children's selection of activities they want to participate in, on the other hand. They also reported their freedom to enter and/or leave the activities whenever they liked. In addition, parents pointed out the freedom of expression during the activities. The director of the Center stated that:

"What we do through activities is that the child shall learn with liking, which is different from if the child is obliged or forced to learn" (director)

Variety of activities: Most of the children and their parents reported that the varieties of activities give the participants possibilities to choose. Children's motivations to participate in the different activities are based accordingly on the nature of each activity, as they reported that the activities are different not only in the age group, but also in the main goal, theme, and content. The two quotations below illustrate this from the point view of a child and the director.

"The benefits of the activities vary, as the activities are different" (ch-5)

"The center is like a long corridor, and we look at the child as the king who walks in his kingdom and decides what he/she wants to do" (director)

Development of activities: Some of the children (ch-3, 7) viewed the activities as dynamic activities. They expressed that the activities develop with them as they progress in their participation.

"The activities are developing with us, I started with design course, then Front Page course, and now I am building a web-site with my mate" (ch-7)

Positive end-products: Some of the children (ch-2, 3, 6) and parents (pa-2, 4, 5, 8) reported that activities always have positive end-products as participation in activities does not require assessment and marks.

Children's active involvement: Children (ch-2, 8) reported that their active involvement and contribution directed the activities. This was affirmed by the

animators and the director. The animators pointed out that they follow the children's desire and recommendations when planning the activities.

"The children are elements of activities, not only recipients" (director)

Age appropriateness: Parents (pa-1, 5) reported that one of the basic elements of the activities is that they are age-appropriated. Each activity targets one same age group or different age groups of the children. The animators also affirmed that this was taken into consideration when activities had been planned.

4.4 Children-Parents Relationship Related to Activities

In this category, I present the children understanding of their parents attitudes towards participation, parents support to their children's participation, parent use of activities as reward and punishment for the child, plans for future participation, and limitations to participation. The information gathered in this category was gathered through questions 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27 (children interview guide), and 12, 17, 18, 24, 26 (parents interview guide).

Children's thoughts about their parents' attitudes towards participation: All the children emphasized that their parents are supporting and encouraging them to participate in the activities. In addition, they reported that their parents value the activities, verbally and through allowing and/or encouraging them to attend the Center's activities.

Parents' support for their children's participation: The children's intrinsic motivation to participate is supported by their parents. The children are the main source of information about the activities to their parents, who hear their spoken reflections and descriptions about their involvement in the activities and share their children in the selection of the activities using the activities monthly calendar published by the Center. At the same time they observe their children's behavioral and academic progress at school and life in general. Parents describe the happiness and enthusiasm in their children when it comes to activities, and what they have learnt

every day. They distinguished the feelings their children express related to everyday routines such as those at school. All parents reported that they encouraged their children to participate. They did so through motivating them, facilitating their participation, by giving permission, and/or by transportation.

Activities as reward and punishment: Most of the parents reported that since they observed the importance of the activities for their children, they started to use their participation as reward for positive behaviors or withdrawal from the Center as punishment for negative behaviors, as they described. One child states:

"If I don't participate, I will be like the young child who doesn't have electricity; he will not be able to do any thing, and he will not even reach his toys to play with" (ch-2)

Her mother stated:

"When it comes to her [daughter] participation in the activities, she is very eager and ready to do what she is asked to do. For me the child without activities is like the plant which you earth in soil -which is important- but the water -activities- is more important" (pa-2)

Plans for future participation: All the children reported that they would like to continue attending the activities till they become 15 years at least. Though children know that the maximum age of participation is 15, some children stated that they would like to continue beyond that age; "till the end of their lives" (ch-3, 8), "till University level" (ch-4), "till I become 30-40 years" (ch-7).

All parents also affirmed that they would like to have their children participating in the activities till the maximum age. They underlined the importance of activities for their children's development.

Limitations to participation in the activities: Two children (ch-5, 6) reported that the long school hours had limited their regular participation in the activities. Since they finish school¹⁸ an hour and a half before the closing hours of the Center in winter times, they could attend activities on Sundays only. Other children (ch-3, 4, 6)

¹⁸ Private schools have two days off a week, Friday and Sunday, while UNRWA and Governmental schools have Friday traditionally, except late changes to have Thursday in addition to Friday.

reported that difficult curriculum home studies, home work, and mid and final school exams limited their participation in the activities.

Parents (pa-5, 6) affirmed the limitation of their children's participation due to private school opening hours. Though some parents (pa-1, 4) stated that they prevent their children to attend the activities in the mid and final exams week, other parents affirmed that they encourage their children to attend the activities even in the peak of exams.

"The problem is that the school curriculum is so difficult. Therefore, we try to limit our child to go out. At the same time we want him to attend the Center's activities" (pa-7)

Other parents (pa-1, 2, 5, 7) reported that the security situation has limited their children to participate on several occasions. They indicated that they prevented their children from going to the Center in highly tense conditions, like incursions and intensive air bombing on the city of Gaza.

Animators reported that the main limitation to children's participation in the future is the increasing number of the children members, given the fact that the Center has maximum capacity connected to the quality of services. The animators and the director pointed out another limitation, which is the increasing number of children memberships filling the Center to its maximum capacity even without media promotion and marketing.

4.5 Perceived Impacts of the Activities on Learning & Development

Although the Center has been open for 16 months, a number of changes have been observed on the children. The changes may be viewed as early indicators of possible effects of the Center's activities on the children's learning and development. The indicators are attributed to the changes observed on children who had been participating in the activities for more than 10 months.

The reported indicators are categorized under the following headings: educational development, social interaction and communication, and psycho-emotional development.

4.5.1 Educational development

Educational development refers to the perceived development in school learning, school marks, interest in the school, and knowledge as well as cultivation¹⁹.

School learning Most of the children affirmed that the Center activities have helped them a lot at school. They feel that they gained more skills in different school subjects, especially in Arabic, English, civil education, and sciences. On the other hand, they reported that they became competent and more willing to participate in their school activities and champions.

"I become much better in English language at school, though I have not participated in English activities in the Center" (ch-6)

Two children (ch-7, 8) reported that they have become better in reading, and in writing composition.

School marks: Most of the children (ch-1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8) reported that they started to get better school marks after they had participated in the different activities at the Center. The improvement in school marks of the children was also affirmed by their parents, except for two parents of the above mentioned children, who reported that no changes have occurred concerning the school marks (pa-1, 8) though they affirmed that their children have maintained their level at school.

Interest in the school: Regarding the school interest, the children (ch-1, 4, 7, 8) reported that they have developed more interest towards school this year in comparison to the last year, which was also confirmed by their parents.

¹⁹ Linguistically also means: edification, educative, education, and culture.

Knowledge and cultivation: All the children reported that they gained more knowledge and cultivation in many areas, not only related to academic knowledge, but also to general information. The children described that they gained specific skills particularly in research. Their capabilities to answer many questions got improved based on knowledge and cultivation gained in many areas. Parents affirmed that they feel their children have gained a lot in very short time, and reported that knowledge and cultivation have reflected a lot on their children's personalities as well.

"My child has gained large amount of knowledge and information; on the personal, national, and world levels. And she started to give me and her father some of what she gained" (par-6)

Animators pointed out the effects of activities that the children had experienced, such as relief, self-expression, higher self-esteem, self-confidence, self-respect and respect of others, and other benefits concerning behavior and learning.

4.5.2 Social interaction and communication:

All the children confirmed that they became more socially interactive, and all of them reported that they have made new friends, where the number of new friends varied from 1 to 15 in and out of the Center.

"I met the new friends at the activities, where we introduced ourselves at the beginning of each activity. Then we had the possibility to talk more after the activity is finished" (ch-1)

All the children have reported that they established these friendships with the same gender, not from the other one. However they initiated conversations, worked together in groups, and shared the other gender during the activities. Some of the children reported that the increase of their friends extended to the outside of the Center, where they made new friendships at the school and in the neighborhood as well.

All parents affirmed that their children became more socially competent than before. They observed better relationships between their children and the surrounding family. Special emphasis was on their new social interaction and communication with their

brothers and sisters as their language²⁰ of communication grew better (pa-2, 4). Two parents (pa-2, 6) reported that their children became more dialectal²¹ in their communication with others.

Parents also reported that their children started to have new social habits, where their children created a Center-friend group, this group of friends started to go and come back together to and from the activities.

"My child became more socially active; she initiated ideas and proposals in front of others. I think that the Center taught her diplomacy of interaction with people" (par-8)

The two informants with special needs reported a growing special social interest during the activities. They reported that they gradually got belonging and love when working in group activities, while they used to avoid interaction with other children before they joined the Center. Both of them have expressed comfort and happiness while being with other children.

"I became capable of speaking with other girls inside and outside the activities ...I am so happy to see people around me and to get to know more of them"(ch-4)

Besides; they started to take new social initiatives towards other children.

"Once I saw a younger child who was not able to read the story, I came close to him and I offered him my help. When he accepted, I read the whole story for him" (ch-3)

4.5.3 Socio-emotional development

Socio-emotional development refers to those perceived changes in the children's psycho-emotional and behavioral traits, and to their personality and resilience.

Psych-emotional and behavioral development: The children stated that they became happier, less-anxious, more enthusiastic, relaxed and comfortable in their daily life since participating in the activities (ch-3, 4, 7).

²⁰ Culturally means the use of the polite form in communication with others.

²¹ They refer to the interlocution of communication.

"In the past I used to be very nervous and irritated. Now I am much better. When my mother feels that I am getting nervous again, she asks me to go to the Center... when I am back home I am like an angel" (ch-3)

Many of the parents asserted what the children had told about themselves (pa-1, 2, 3, 4, 7). They added that their children became more active and proud, more encouraged, more high spirited and motivated, and inventive.

"My child's mental health is excellent now compared to when she used to be alone. She had secluded herself from the life around her, doing her homework and sleep. Since she started participating in the activities she comes and goes, actively moving around, and she feels motivated and proud of herself"(par-4)

Several children (ch-2, 3, 4, 5, 8) stated that they have "better mental health"²² (better psychological status). They emphasized that they became more comfortable, calm, and relaxed.

Some parents (pa-1, 5, 6, 7) emphasized that the activities have helped their children in the war situation by becoming more resilient. They observed that their children got adapted to the surrounding traumas. While parents (pa-3, 7) reported that their children have relieved energy as they seemed to be less nervous and less irritated.

Personality: Two children (ch-2, 7) reported that they became more able to express themselves "self-expression", while most of the children reported that they became more self-conscious since they linked it to the development of their general knowledge and cultivation. All parents asserted the observation of positive changes in the personality of their children. Common and different descriptions and phrases of personality development among their children were used; "more responsible personality" (pa-1, 5), "more self-conscious", and "gained self-actualization" (pa-1, 2, 3, 6, 8), and "became stronger personality" (pa-2, 6).

"My daughter personality is excellently polished, which was so surprising to me; her personality became stable, mature, empowered, and self-confident" (pa-2)

²² In Arabic language; people including the children use the term "mental health" in general. It is used to ask or to tell how ones' feel (i.e.: how is your psychology?)

Interests and hobbies: Most of the children (ch-1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8) emphasized that they have the chance to develop their hobbies, especially in arts, reading, and computer application at the Center. The children expanded their description about their development of hobbies. One of them told he was participating in building web sites. The children talked about their development in reading habit and how they became more eager towards searching for information and to love knowledge. Two children (ch-3, 7) also reported about acquisition of new skills which they learned at the Center which became a new hobby for them to practice, as they did not have anything to do when they were at home in their free time (i.e. Loom making).

Parents have affirmed that their children started to be developed in their earlier hobbies, and have acquired/discovered new hobbies which they liked and started to practice. In addition, one parent (pa-5) affirmed that he believed the activities would have positive influence on his child's learning and development as long as his child is continuously attending the activities on weekly basis. He stated:

"Changes on the child learning are closely influenced by the child's regular attendance to the activities. I know it is difficult for the center to monitor children development one by one, as there are many children, and services are collectively organized, not individually-based" (par-5)

4.6 The Center as an Out-of-School Setting

This category related to how children and parents perceived the Center as a setting besides the traditional setting like home and school. The reported views were categorized under the following sub-headings: educational support setting, community-social setting, and welcoming setting.

4.6.1 Educational support setting

Most children (ch-1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) stated that the Center is actually helping them in their schooling and academic achievement. They reported different aspects of the Center's support to the school, especially in gaining knowledge, skills, and gaining understanding necessary for mastery. Children's description of the relation between the Center and school was concrete in the way they presented the benefits of the

Center on their schooling. Parents also emphasized the importance of the Center's role in supporting schooling. They said that the Center and the school are two integrated settings, where each setting is supporting their children's learning.

"The Center and school are two educational correlated settings, taking into consideration the basic differences between them" (pa- 1)

On the other hand, parents believe that the Center is compensating the lack of activities provided to their children at school.

"The relationship between the Center and school is integral especially that school is in short of providing the non-curricular activities" (ch-5)

Parents (pa-2, 5, 6, 7) reported that the Center is taking care of the children's cultural learning, while school is taking care of the children's academic learning.

"What a child receives at the Center is culture, the community culture, while on the contrary; school is interested in marks and promotion to the next class. Also, the Center's activities encourage children after long six hours at school" (pa-8)

Regarding the school support to the Center, two parents (pa-2, 6) reported that the school allowed their children to leave early in order to allow the children to attend specific activities at the Center.

4.6.2 Community-social setting

All the children reported the importance of the Center for their social interaction with children and animators. They affirmed that what they like is the presence of children; especially their friends and the animators.

All parents affirmed the positive social aspects of the Center; they reported that one of the most important Center's identities lie in socialization. Parents (pa- 2, 5, 6) reported that the Center is a small community combining different age groups together.

"The Center is a small community; it has the trainers and supervisors. It has his friends, and mates who say thank you and welcome. I want my child to communicate and interact with this community which is a clean environment for children" (pa-5)

4.6.3 A welcoming setting

The two children with special needs (ch-3, 4) reported that they are actually participating in all the activities that they wanted to participate in. Furthermore, they affirmed that the activities were adapted to them. They also pointed that they are receiving normal treatment and communication from the animators, without any special care or special attention. They also reported that this normal treatment makes them happier. Concerning their relation with other children, they reported that they made new friends, feel accepted among others, though they also pointed out that some other children look at them as abnormal.

Their parents (pa-3, 4) affirmed that the Center is so important especially for their children who have special needs. They asserted that the Center is also important because it provides recreation and communication opportunities with other children, especially they lack opportunities of interaction and communication outside school.

4.7 Summary

The background information of the children reveals that they came from varied families in terms of their parents' age, education background, profession, and socio-economic status. No significant differences were found between the different families related to their perception of the activities.

Differences between children and parents informants concerning their initial motivation to participate in activities are observed. While children find the motivation for their participation in recreation and learning, parents' view the useful leisure time as their main motive for allowing their children to participate.

Children and their parents view the activities as multi-dimensional, which creates their motivation to participate in activities; educational, learning and education enrichment, interaction and communication. The relationship between the children and the animators was considerably emphasized. The informants reported important aspects and motivation of activities like, free and voluntary participation, frame

factors like building and free of charge activities, development of activities, positive end-products of activities, development of activities, variety of activities offered, age appropriateness, children active involvement, and expressing their feeling during the activities.

The informants also pointed out some limitations related to participation; school hours, difficult school curriculum, home work and exams, and the vulnerable security situation, while the director and the animators pointed out the increasing number of children memberships compared to the size and capacity of the Center.

The children and their parents perceived the activities as positive effect for learning and development, though it can be regarded as early indicators. The children and their parents demonstrated awareness of different aspects of educational development, interaction and communication, and socio-emotional development.

The Center as an out-of-school setting was perceived as educational support setting, community-social setting, and welcoming setting.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, & Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from chapter 4 in relation to the theoretical framework of chapter 2 in focus on the research main and sub-questions, following the categorization of data presentation. Gall et. al. (2003) states that, "the most important task in writing the discussion chapter is to identify and interpret the most important results". The researcher summarized the finding in separate working sheets to be able to identify the most significant findings from different dimensions. The findings revealed to be inter-connected, since each point of the informants' perception of activities was found to influence and/or be influenced by one or more other element/s.

5.2 Discussion

This study relates to the children and parents interpretation of the activities offered by the a children cultural center, both on the activity level and on the Center level as an out-of-school setting by raising the voice of children, and digging on their understanding of what the activities mean.

In the Palestinian context, the parents influence or/and decide almost always their child's engagements in different life activities. That is why it was important to look at the parents' perception related to their children's perception. Different elements of children motives of exploration and support were noticed between children and their parents, especially that activities are not offered at the initial child settings like home and school. Following this, Bronfenbrenner (1979) states:

"Developmental effects are not likely to be manifested until the person moves from his present primary setting into another, potential primary setting, that is, from a setting that has instigated and currently maintains the person's present level and direction of functioning to another setting requiring the person to take initiative to find new sources of stimulation and support". (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 286).

5.2.1 Perception of activities and motivation to participation

The perception of the activities was strongly articulated in the children's and parents' attempt to interpret the motivation towards the participation in the activities, as explained earlier in chapter 4. In other words, perception and the expectations from the activities stood for their motivation. It seems that the multi-dimensional elements of the activities (since activities are not rigid) as perceived by the informants are, at the same time, based on the children's and their parents' motivation to participate.

The Center's activities formulate a system. The system contains several elements like learning and interaction with peers, animators, and the overall context within which they are embedded. Therefore, the Center's activities constitute a microsystem, alongside home and school microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The children are moving spontaneously between their traditional microsystems (school and home) to the new microsystem's activities. The child's transition to the new microsystem is recognized and supported by home and school. Findings revealed that parents follow and support their children's initiatives for participation in the Center's activities. The children had been informed about the activities mainly by friends followed by school and parents. On the other hand, school also supported and encouraged the children to participate in the new microsystem's activities. Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that participants in the original setting (home/school) can influence allocation of resources and the making of decisions that are responsive to the needs of the developing person (the child). The activities that routinely take place within different settings are keys to understanding parents' cultural construction of their child's life and development (Harkness & Super, 1995).

The child is located in the middle of a triangulation of systems; home, school, and the Center. The systems serve the child's development and well-being. The effect of the new system's activities was observed at level of the traditional microsystems, which justifies their support to the child to participate in the Center's activities. The relation between the triangulation of systems can be viewed from a mesosystem perspective. Bronfenbrenner (1979) views the *mesosystem* as a set of interrelations between two or

more settings in which the developing person becomes an active participant. The developing person (the child) takes voluntarily and willingly part in the Center's activities as showed in the findings presented in chapter 4. Thus, findings from the children, animators, and director interviews indicate that the children are active members in activities they chose to attend, since children affirmed their active involvement. This goes in line with Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1952), and Rye's (2001) assumptions about the process of children's active roles of their learning and development.

Activities in a multi-dimensional perspective: Findings revealed that the children and their parents perceived the activities from multi-dimensional perspectives. They pointed out that activities contain recreational, educational and learning, and social interaction and communication aspects in the Center's environment. These findings are in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979), Vygotsky's (1978), and Feuestein's (1991) arguments that meaningful environment gives the child the opportunity to act and interact with it. Johnsen (2001) asserted that children learn through different strategies, activities, media, and methods. This variation of perspectives was also supported by Befring's (2001) view of enrichment in which children's participation in suitable and adapted tasks enables socialization and interaction. This enriching and multi-dimensional view- based on participants' experiences of activities- is not only a perception, but also a motivation embedded in their interpretation.

The motivational aspects stem from the participants' desires, wants and purposes (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). It seems that the enriching experiences of recreation, learning, and interaction (as viewed by the participants) are embedded in one's participation in one experience (activities) making this experience meaningful. That is because the experiences contain different aspects and address the needs of children and parents alike. I strongly believe that the activities were positively described by the children simply because they are multi-dimensional (recreation, educational, and social interaction). This combination of the three elements encourages the children to participate in activities based on their intrinsic motivation described by Stipek (1993).

Children relationship to animators and animator's role in the activities: The other main element in the children's and parents' perception of activities is the animators and the relationships connecting them with the children. Since children description of their relationship with the animators was positively characterized as "close", "supportive", and "mutual respect". They furthermore called them "activators", "group leaders", and "supervisors" which gives an indication of the relationship between them and the animators. Parents described the animators as "important" to their children, because of the "respect relationship" with the children which, also, regarded as major motivation to participation. The animators are those who are doing one of the most important jobs. Their job is not only to teach or work as "educators", but it expands more to children's learning and development through encouraging active learning, playing, sharing ideas, skills, and experiences. Thus, they have far-reaching effects on the children's interaction in the first place, and on their overall perception of the activities.

The above description of the animators by the children and the parents is supported by Vygotsky's idea about the presence of a more mature person in the child's interaction environment, where the animators guide the children through a medium of social interaction for learning and development, and by Feuestein's thinking about the human mediator in which the child interacts within a socio-cultural environment. Vygotsky (in Dixon-Krauss, 1996) perceives the adult role (animator) as that of mediating the child's learning activity while sharing knowledge and meaning through social interaction. Rogoff emphasizes *reciprocity* and *intersubjectivity*, in which the children interact and communicate verbally and non-verbally, and share focus in a social activity with their partners (animators and peers) collaboratively, while the quality of interaction among the animators and children in the Center's activities is quite vital as emphasized by Rye (2001).

In the context of the activities offered by cultural centers, the animators help the children to be involved in reciprocal social interaction in a group, identify their interests and concerns, and work on developing themselves from the point where they

are in a fully socially interactive manner. This goes in line with Vygotsky's theory where he views the human mediator's function as to carry the signs, symbols, and meanings in the child's development processes. Vygotsky (1978) argues that social relationships (between child-animator and child-peers) are primary, and individuality is a secondary phenomenon in the social development of an individual. Issues of social relations bring to attention the people's view of how self-interests and collective interests operate in a form of social interaction (Rogoff, 2003). Since the animator's definition of children is of important for interaction (Hundeide, 2005), the animators are viewed as facilitators, and the children are cared for while viewed as active members in the Center's activities which indeed manifest natural social interaction. The care in social interaction context is achieved by *play* among the group members (animators and children) though they are focused on task-oriented activities (Johnsen, 2001).

Children attentively avoided calling the animators as 'teachers', because they know from their experience what a teacher is; "a teacher is at school system". They distinguished the animators due to their roles in the Center's context. The animators' encouragement, appreciation, and acknowledgement of the children in the activities manifest the children's extrinsic motivation asserted by Stipek (1993) that children need to be recognized and acknowledged. The findings indeed conveyed that the needs of the children are in the core of motivation to participation in the activities. Rye (2001) argues that it is important for the children's sense of security that the animators are emotionally accessible through their affection, care, and display of pleasure and enthusiasm. The animators functioned in an 'Authoritative' manner which gained both the activities and the children positive returns. This manifests the significant results on Authoritative attitudes, Rye (2001).

The child-animator relationship in the socio-cultural context of the activities shows that the children actively and voluntarily participate in the activities, and that the animators, as scaffold, facilitate the children's learning through guided participation in peer-group based activities (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990).

Child-Parent interaction related to the activities: The variety of activities offered by the Center has important reflections manifested in two main aspects; first, it helped the children to make choices based on their intrinsic motivation and exposure to different kinds of stimuli related the peculiar nature of each activity following their inclinations, interests, and needs (Feuestein, 1991; Stipek, 1993); second, it created bilateral dialogue and quality interaction between the children and their parents. For instance, results show that parents discussed with their children the calendar of the Center's activities. So, the parents' interaction and communication demonstrated positive interaction-quality with their children in a dyadic inspiration, and being active in their children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This would normally lead to children's feelings of respect and emotional security (Rye, 2001).

The parents' role was also asserted by Reggio Emilia's approach, in which parents are viewed as competent partners in day-to-day interaction with the children, ensuring their children's welfare at the Center's activities (Gandini, 2002). In line with Harkness & Super (1995) the Center's activities -as cultural practices involved in the care and rearing of children- instantiated cultural themes of importance to their parents.

Variety of activities: The findings from the children's and parents' perceived understanding of the activities show that they stressed on the variety of the activities, where some of the activities are dynamic and progressively developed. This view was shared by the director and the animators. The dynamic and progressive nature of the activities is seen as a motivation factor for learning and development, both intrinsically and extrinsically. 'Intrinsically' refers to the child role as an active person in his learning and development as viewed by Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1952) & Rye (2001), and 'extrinsically' refers to the child's participation in more progressive and developing skills which gain him praise and acknowledgement by other children, animators, and parents. This is supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) argument that the child requires participation in progressively more complex reciprocal activities on regular basis over an extended period in the child's life. Vygotsky (1978) confirms that a child's participation in a more complex task with animators in the Zone of

Proximal Development helps the child to acquire the cultural tools of thoughts, and enable him/her to carry out such thinking independently for own purposes. This is further supported by Rogoff (2003) that interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development allows the child to participate in a variety of activities, which is impossible for him/her alone.

"Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content"
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 27)

(Bronfenbrenner (1979) further argues that the development of the child is enhanced through his/her increased involvement in task-oriented activities outside home that brings him/her into contact with adults other than parents. Johnsen (2001) on her Curriculum Relation Model, argues that the starting point is the learner's (child's) existing knowledge, skills, interests, capacities, possibilities and understanding which have to be seen in relation to the education she or he is part of.

Social interaction: Social interaction is considered to be the base of the underlying philosophy of the activities offered by the Center. According to (Gandini, 2002; Rogoff, 1990; 2003), the social context is the essence of the whole child's development based on his/her participation in the dynamic and progressive activities, including peer interaction and communication, guided participation, reciprocity, intersubjectivity, and motivation. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that social interaction is a medium for child's development. Focusing on social interaction and communication between the group members (children) and their caregiver (animators) during the activities, the children got required learning environments created, which was also understood and interpreted by their parents.

Frame factors: Children and parents perceived motivation to participation was linked also to the physical, economic, and personnel (human) elements of the Center. The physical elements contain the building design, colors, quietness, availability of resources, and rooms to practice the activities, while the economic element referred to

the free of charge activities. In line with Johnsen (2001), the frame factors for the Center set limits and give direction providing possibilities for learning and exploration. The frame factors encourage the children and the parents to participate. The Center is an amiable, beautiful, and well-equipped, not only physically, but also concerning the human interaction factors making it a haven for children. This was supported by Reggio Emilia approach on the children's learning environment (Gandini, 2002). Economic frame factors were discussed in the Center's General Policy Document (1998)²³ which highlighted that services are free of charge for memberships, library, and participation in activities, and reduced charge for cafeteria, photocopying, and specified training courses.

Limitations to participation: The main limitation to participation at the Center's activities are perceived to be the long school hours, home work related to school and its curriculum, and exams. This was discussed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) that the developmental potential of children cultural centers setting varies inversely with the number of intermediate links in the network chain connecting that setting to setting of power (school/home), though schools indeed supported the children's initiatives to participate in the Center's activities. Findings from interviews with the director and animators referred to other limitations concerning the growing number of children memberships, where the Center Annual Report²⁴ (2007) indicated that 59375 children participated in 2317 activities, and 123 schools (3929 children) and 106 kindergarten (3694 children) have visited the Center. They believed that the growing number will exceed the Center's capacity.

5.2.2 Perceived effects of activities on learning & development

The perceived effect of the children and their parents from participation in activities on learning and development cannot be discussed in isolation from the previous discussion of their perceived motivation and meaning of the different aspects of

²³ Qattan Center for the Child (1998). General Policy Document.

²⁴ Qattan Centre for the Child (2007). Covers the period from April, 2006 till March, 2007.

activities offered at the children cultural centers. Environmental stimulation was much emphasized by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Feuestein (1980), and by Vygotsky's argument that meaningful environment arouses and motivates the child for development. Therefore, the developmental indicators of the children are linked to their motivation, and how they positively perceive the activities from their actual participation, in which they feel comfortable and interested in learning curiosity that lead to development. On the other hand, the reported developments of children might be down to the fact that Center is relatively new²⁵ and/or the Center's environment is different for the other microsystems (home & school), being friendly and lovely environment different from tense conditions due to political situation (macrosystem & chronosystem) where children are away from the external socio-emotional blows (Johnsen, 2005). Further more, the overall situation of the Center helps the children to develop resiliency from the traumatic events around them.

The children, their parents and professionals (animators & director) reported several arenas like cognitive, social interaction, and on the child's socio-emotional development. These described developments were not only observed at the center, but it was generalized to the child's home and school, since it was observed and affirmed by parents. Skjørten (2001) highlighted the role of cultural activities in promoting emotional, social, and cognitive growth in individuals and group as whole.

Bronfenbrenner ²⁶(1979) sets two criteria in order to demonstrate that the child's development has occurred referring to developmental validity: 1) *change in the child's conception of his/her self*; which was demonstrated through the children's descriptions of their development in different areas, including their perceived conception of themselves by their awareness of the occurred development, and 2) *changes of the*

²⁵ The centre was opened to public in September, 2005.

²⁶ "To demonstrate that human development has occurred, it is necessary to establish that a change produced in the person's conceptions and/or activities carries over to other settings and other times. Such demonstration is referred to as developmental validity". (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 35)

child's activities are carried over to another setting, which was demonstrated by the children's and their parents' responses about the effect of the activities that was carried to school and home alike. The indicated educational and learning achievement was carried at school setting, while interaction and communication developments were carried with their families' members and creation of new friendships at home, neighborhoods, Center, and school. Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided supported framework for developmental validity stating that:

"A setting become ecologically valid for research on human behavior and development only when the following two conditions are met: the psychological and social meaning of the subject's experience in the setting is investigated and becomes known to the researcher, and the subjective meaning of the research situation corresponds to the environmental experiences to which the investigator wishes to generalize". (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 125)

It seems that the overall environment offered at the Center, which is different from outer environment is helping the child to gain other sorts of stimuli needed, supported by Feustein's et. al. (1980) argument that a child's participation and exposures to new environment (culturally different) produces high level of learning capacity. This is supported by Vygotsky's assertion that cognitive development is associated with the individual's social interaction with the surrounding environment. This, therefore, justifies the children's better academic achievement at their school as revealed by the findings. Furthermore, it justifies the increase of the children's interest at school based on the above developments, mainly the educational and learning development.

Barber, Stone & Eccles (2005) affirm that there is good evidence that participating in community based activities is associated with both short and long-term indicators of development. The activities evidently helped the children to develop better conception of themselves, and better attitudes towards learning in different settings. Findings from the director and the animators revealed that their main attempts are to create lovely and desirable leaning environment where all children are capable to learn. Befring (2001) noted that many children can remain vulnerable to develop negative attitudes towards learning and toward themselves believing that they are unable to learn and feel inferior.

Children's gained skills, knowledge, and cultivation throughout their participation in the activities based on their active engagement with the animators as scaffold in structured activities and the surrounding environment (Sehic et. al. 2005). Animators working as scaffold help children to raise current skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence, and foster and achieve self-regulation (Rogoff, 1990). Feuestein (1991) argues that mediated learning with the adult gives the child the exposure to stimuli within the activities environment, and contributes to the child's formal and informal learning and development.

Rye (2001) argues that it is significant to appreciating child's abilities helps in mastering the skills. In this regard, the findings show that the activities are designed by animators based on age-group considerations, which also was affirmed by the children as "age-appropriate". Age-appropriateness in the activities context means designing activities to respect the child's abilities and needs for developing a further level, according to Vygotsky's Proximal Zone of Development, Rogoff (1990) & Sehic et. al. (2005). Larson & Verma (1999, in Hofferth & Curtin, 2005) argue that activities can function as new learning environment for mastering specific skills and techniques out the school and home settings.

Social development was indicated by the children and their parents alike, as they reported the development of better social interaction and communication skills. The children became more socially interactive, gained new friends, and became more socially competent and properly communicative in their relationships with others like family members and mates. In addition, children with special needs confirmed the above; they gained belonging and love to work with other children in group.

Bronfrenbrenner (1979), Vygotsky (1978), and Rogoff (1990, 2003) argue that relationships of different qualities are developed as the children do activities together in social environment. The reason behind this change in the children's social learning and abilities can be discussed in light of Feuestein's (1991) concept of modeling from others surrounding the child (i.e.: animators and peers in activities). Rye (2001); Rye & Hundeidi (2003) assert that children can develop socially and emotionally when

positive interactions of the child with peers and adults are manifested. This is affirmed by Rogoff (1990) & Sehic et. al. (2005), that animator as scaffold supports the children development through socially constructed situations. Skjørten (2001; 2007) underlined the impact of activities on the children's social development, and development of social units (group). She argues that social competence is one of the main influencing factors of the child's wellbeing. This comes in agreement with Johnsen (2001), who places the social interaction and communication in the heart of her Curriculum Relation Model, emphasizing its central relation to the child's learning. Larsen (1994 in Hofferth & Curtin, 2005) affirms that activities promote positive relationships with the adults and with peers.

It seems that the educational and social development of children have also reflected on their general mental health. The children and their parents reported better perception of the child's own self (self-worth, self-concept and self esteem, and self-actualization), and better personality. Skjørten (2001, 2007) argues that activities influence emotional and intellectual, and self-worth, self-esteem and self-actualization and realization of children. Also McGee et al. (2006) findings show that activities associated with higher level of social self-concept, and perceived strengths. Thus, as self-esteem increases, so does achievement (Covington, 1989), which justifies the children's better achievements at school, as described by children and parents. The activities, with their positive outcomes have helped the children to experience success, gain better self-awareness, and become confident, which seems to foster the child's development at school and home, as well as in life in general.

5.2.3 The Center as an out-of-school setting

Besides the above discussion concerning the role of Center's activities in promoting educational, social, and psycho-emotional learning and development, findings from all the informants revealed that the Center as a setting played other roles serving the community interests and needs by supporting and/or compensating the existing systems.

The findings from the children's and parents' interview, based on perceived experience, show that the Center's activities have contributed to the children's learning skills, manifested in their better schooling marks and interest for school. It seems that children have, as an outcome, strengthened their self-actualization, based on their fulfillment of their needs as asserted by Maslow (1970), and fulfillment of activities needs that are not offered at school. Diab (2000) found that lack of school extra-curricular activities led to of children's under-achievements at Palestinian schools. The children's fulfillment of their need of activities improved their general satisfaction, which increased their attachment and interest for school. This is supported by March (1992, in McGee et. al., 2006) who found that participation in activities strengthens the ties to school and increases self-concept. Mahoney and Crain (1997, in McGee et. al., 2006) found that participation in activities reduce school dropout.

The Center also provides happiness to the children through different activities, particularly the recreational ones. The importance of the activities lies in the implementation in an outer atmosphere of violence, conflict, and military occupation since 40 years, which has its reflections on the *chronosystem*. This is found in agreement with Johnsen (2005) who argues that learning environment should acts to be a safe haven from events like war, and respond to eliminate the children's socio-emotional blows. Parents view the importance of activities as helpful for their children's relief and resilience. This view is supported by Punamaki, et. al. (2001) and Awwad, et. al. (1999) that the support system and its social and cultural surrounding around the children can strengthen resilience. Vygotsky also supports the view that interaction in socio and cultural environments will be of great help for children experiencing trauma.

Socio-cultural environment includes the animators support for children who experienced traumatic events and losses (Befring, 2001). The discussion of the activities in helping the children's resiliency or/and resiliency factors cannot be seen without the earlier discussion about the social environment embedded in the Center's

activities by the sense of "normality" in the life of Palestinian, and helping children by providing them with greater opportunities to participate in on-going recreational, learning, cultural, and other non-formal activities. (Arafat & Boothby, 2003)

The Center also works as a welcoming setting for children with and without impairment. Findings from the children with special needs and their parents' interviews show that they feel accepted in the groups of children, activities are accessible/ adaptable to them, and above all they have "normal" experiences as others. The welcoming environment of the Center is supported by Salamanca Statement (2004), Johnsen's (2001), and Befring (2001) views about the plurality of celebrating differences in the community of the Center. Children with and without impairment participate jointly in group activities that help them to see the plurality of differences. This goes in agreement with Solner and Thousand (1995) and Johnson and Johnson (1989) that children's acceptance of differences exists in children's cooperative groups where children with and without impairments are together. Skjørten (2001) supports the inclusion children with special needs having the opportunity to interact, play, learn, and experience a sense of belonging within their natural environment

To conclude, the Center acts as a multi-functional setting; through its attempt to help the children in their learning, development, and wellbeing. It also helps home and school to offer different environments and stimuli for children. It offers opportunities of recreation, care, and support needed for children experiencing traumatic war events, and welcoming setting of a community of differences.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

This study was an investigation of children's and their parent's perceptions of experiencing activities offered by children cultural centers, in terms of their motivation to participate in the activities, their perceived effects on children's learning and development, and their thoughts about the Center as an out-of-school setting.

Both of the children and the parents proved to be aware of the reinforcing, stimulating, motivating, accepting, and caring atmosphere of the children cultural centers activities. The Center offered multi-dimensional elements of activities which obviously succeeded in the achievement of the perceived qualities. The whole environment of the Center's activities has implications on the children's development in many arenas, in which perceived development attained educational, social, emotional, psychological, and perceived self competence. To create a caring context of learning and development of children, learning should be based on positive children's experiences of the context. Daniel (2001) supported Vygotsky's, Bronfenbrenner's, & Fueustein's views when affirming that children do not develop in isolation, but that learning takes place when they interact with their social environment.

Furthermore, the children cultural centers also acts as support for school, as a safe haven from violence, and as a welcoming place for children with special needs in a community based context for all. The process of building the civil society in Palestine essentially requires the community centers to take an important part in promoting children's welfare at any level possible, to support children learning and development from multi-sector involvement.

5.4 Recommendations

- Opening further centers in all geographic areas of Palestine, and the world for contributing to the child's wellbeing, learning and development.
- Adaptation of school environment in Palestine towards more child-oriented learning based on their motivation for further development and skills acquisitions.
- Implementation of activities for children in war zones in Palestine and around the world.
- Welcoming children with special needs on regular basis to participation in activities.

5.4.1 Recommended further studies:

This study has brought so many questions and implications for further research:

- More studies about the learning and social environment of children cultural centers.
- Children's motivation to learning in different contexts, by emphasizing the children's voice, desires, and wishes.
- Further studies on the animators (adult) role in facilitating the learning and development of children in children cultural centers.
- Studies on the children cultural centers accessibility and activities adaptability to children with special needs.
- Studies on children cultural centers as community inclusive setting by its nature.
- Studies to explore the children cultural centers setting and their activities based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective.
- Studies on Activities Relation Model in light of Curriculum Relation Model of Johnsen (2001).
- Studies on applying the ICDP program in the children cultural centers context.
- Further studies are needed to explore the effects of the activities on children's learning and development in general, and on children educational, social, emotional, psychological aspects in particular.
- Longitudinal studies are needed to monitor the implications of activities on children's learning and development.
- Experimental researches should take place to find the similarities and differences between children who participate in activities and who do not.
- Studies of the effect of activities with traumatized children of war and violence.

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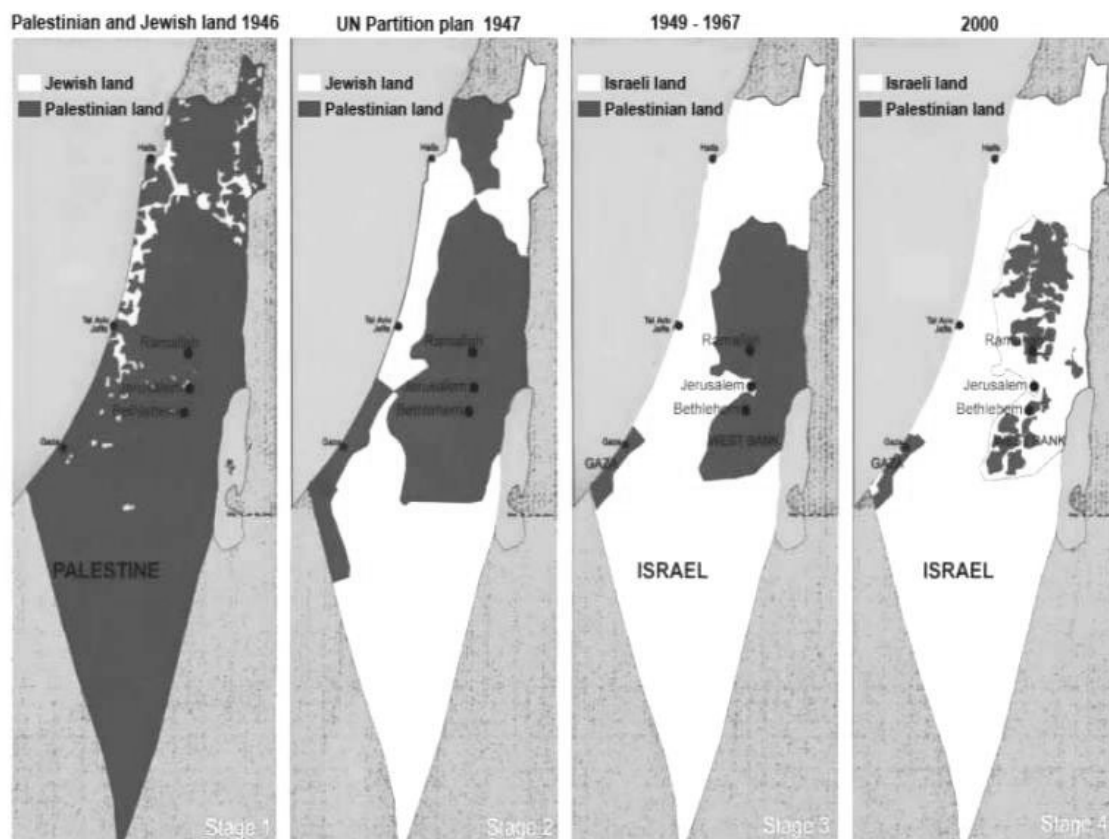
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Loss of Palestinian land from 1946-2000.



Appendix 2: Palestine after the 1967 War



Appendix 3: Traumatic Experiences of the Children



UNRWA School on the main street in Gaza.

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Appendix 4: Overview of the Center

External view of the Center



Horizontal view of the Center's components



1	Multi-purpose room	8.a	Library (under 6 years & parents)
2	Cafeteria	8.b	Library (6-11 years)
3	Exhibition area	8.c	Library (12-15)
4	Training room	9	Art
5	IT computer lab	10	Out-door courts
6	Circulation desk	11	Video screen room
7	Study area	12	Mobile library
8	The Library	13	Administration

Appendix 5: Overview of activities

Some of the activities in 2006:

no.	Activities	Brief Description	Age group	Frequency	No of Children
1	Cultural Competition	Questions and g for audience and two group	6-15	Once a week	100-120
2	Open MIC	Children performs on the stage what they like to present for other children like, songs, poets,etc.	5-15	Once a week	100
3	Art Performanc e	Different artistic performances from professional groups	5-15	Once a week	120
4	Drama workshop	The discovery of the artistic talents through dramatic games	10-12	Once a month (4 days)	20
5	Roots & branches	Historical Debate	13-15	Once a week	25
6	Palestinian story	Palestinian story telling	10-15	Once a week	20
7	Physical activities	Just movement	6-15	Once a week	100
8	Seminar	Different topics related to children and family	Family	Once month	20
9	My favorite book	One child tell others about book he/she like	6-16	Three times a week	15
10	Creative story	Mothers tell story & act it	Under 6	Three times a week	20
11	Joy & Happy	Children playing with toys	Under 6	Once a week	20
12	Shapes & colors	Art workshops	Under 6	Every day	20
13	We want to draw	Free drawing	6-15	Every day	30
14	Story telling	Story telling	0-6	Every day	20
15	Water, land & Air	Get knowledge about nature	6-12	3 times per month	15
16	Search, think & win	Competition	12-15	Every day	Opened

17	Search in internet and win	Answer question through internet	12-15	Every day	Opened
18	Video	Video show	0-15	3 times a day	15
19	Young librarian	Meetings for recognition of the work inside the library	12-15	4 days in month	15
20	What do you know about?	The children search information about the nature	6-12	Every day	80
21	The sciences laboratory	The execution of some simplified scientific experiments	10-12	4 days in month	15
22	The best I read	Children record phrases from books they admired	12-15	Every day	80
23	Stars in the sky of the knowledge	Children search about historical characters	12-15	Every day	80
24	Young chief	How to prepare some meals	4- 5	One week (5 times).	20
25	Our green world	How to grow	6-8	One week (5 times).	20
26	Not only draw	Discover the nature	10-12	One week (5 times).	20
27	Needle and thread	Natural materials like the cloths and souf	10-12	One week (5 times).	20
28	From the land	Learn geography through nature issues	10-15	One week (5 times).	20
29	Fine fingers	Create story then make cartoon	4-5	One week (5 times).	20
30	The young scientist	Scientific experiments by using natural materials	6-9	One week (5 times).	20
31	Nature museum	Materials from the nature	10-12	One week (5 times).	20
32	Wool and textile	Drawing shapes in the cloths	10-12	One week (5 times).	20
33	Wood × Wood	A carving parts of wood	12-15	One week (5 times).	20
34	Collage	Learning different printing techniques	6-9	One week(5 times)	20

Some of the Information Technology activities:

No.	Activities	Brief Description	Age group	Frequency	No of Children
1	The computer is my friend	How to deal with computer.	2 nd to 5 th	One week (5 times)	12
2	Visual Basic	Programming	6 th to 9 th grade	One week (5 times)	12
3	Front page	Designed inter net pages	6 th to 9 th grade	Tow week (3 times)	12
4	How it work?	function of computer parts	3rd to 9 th grade	Twice a week	15
5	C D hour	Using Cds	2nd to 9 th grade	Twice a week	20
6	Designing with computer	Design short movies	6 th to 9 th grade	One week (5 times)	12
7	Microsoft Windows & word	How to use word, windows	3rd to 9 th grade	One weeks (5 times)	12
8	Internet	How to use internet	3rd to 9 th grade	One week (5 times).	12
9	Power point	How to designed presentation	6 th to 9 th grade	One week (5 times)	12
10	Flash	How to use flash	6 th to 9 th grade	Twice week	12
11	How staff work	How mouse functioning	4th to 9 th grades	Twice a week	15
12	C Ds hour	Using cds	2nd to 9 th grades	Twice a week	20

Appendix 6: Selected images from the activities





Appendix 7: Letter from the University of Oslo



UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO

Department of Special Needs Education

P.O.Box 1140, Blindern
N-0318 Oslo
NORWAY

Your ref:
Our ref: 13/06 BHI/db
Contact person: Denese Brittain d.a.brittain@isp.uio.no

Visiting address:
Helga Eng's Building
3rd and 4th floor

Date: June 27. 2006

Telephone: + 47 22 85 80 59
Telefax: + 47 22 85 80 21

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that **AL.ROZZI, Emad Ismael**, date of birth 26.07.1975, is a full-time student pursuing a course of study at the Department of Special Needs Education at the University of Oslo, Norway, leading to the degree of Master of Philosophy in Special Needs Education (M. Phil. SNE).

This is a continuous two-year programme run on the "sandwich" principle, which involves periods of study and field work/research in both Norway and the home country. The student has concluded the initial 11-month period in Norway and will be returning to the home country in July 2006 to continue full-time studies/research until 1 January 2007 when s/he returns to Norway for the final part of the degree. The period of study will be completed at the end of May 2007.

The main responsibility for supervising the research, developmental work and thesis remains with the Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, Norway. However, we would kindly request that the relevant authorities give the student the access required to the schools and educational establishments necessary in order to undertake field work and research. We would also be most grateful for any assistance that is afforded to the student which enables her/him to carry out this work, particularly the use of facilities such as access to telephone, fax, e-mail, computer services and libraries at the various educational establishments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Berit Helene Johnsen'.

Associate Professor Berit Helene Johnsen (dr.scient.)
Academic Head of International Master's Programme
Department of Special Needs Education

Department of Special Needs Education
Faculty of Education
University of Oslo, Norway

Institutt for spesialpedagogikk
Det utdanningsvitenskapelige fakultet
Universitetet i Oslo
Norge

Appendix 8: Letter to parents and children

Request for Research Participation

To the parent of the child: _____

My name is Emad Al-Rozzi, I am a master student at the Department of Special Need Education- Faculty of Education, University of Oslo- Norway.

Kindly, I request your permission to interview you and your child who is a member at the [REDACTED] Center for the Child to participate in the research about yours experiences of the activities offered by the children cultural centers. This study will be important to understand how parents and children perceive and experience the activities.

I would like to confirm that the interviews will focus on the purpose of the study as mentioned above, and I assure you that the information gathered during the interview will be used only for the purpose of the study, and it will be kept confidential.

If you need more information, please don't hesitate to contact me

Mobile: 0599 601360

Thank you in advance to your understanding and cooperation

(Please fill the following part, and return it back)

Your decision:

_____ Yes, my child and I are willing to participate in the study.

_____ No, my child and I are not willing to participate in the study.

If yes, where do you prefer to have the interview?

Please mark the appropriate choice from the following:

At the center _____ At your home _____ Others, please specify _____

Date: _____ Parent name & signature: _____

Emad Al-Rozzi

Student at University of Oslo/Norway

Appendix 9: Letter to parents and children (Arabic)

طلب مشاركة في بحث دراسي

السيد ولي أمر الطفل/الطفلة: _____ المحترم
اسمي عماد إسماعيل الرزي، وحالياً أنا طالب لدرجة الماجستير في قسم التربية الخاصة بكلية التربية في جامعة أوصلو - النرويج.
إنني أتقدم بطلب الموافقة لإجراء مقابلة شخصية معك ومع طفلك المشترك/ة في مركز [] للطفل، ضمن بحث أجريه حول خبرتكم مع الأنشطة المقدمة من خلال المراكز الثقافية الفلسطينية. حيث أن أهمية هذا البحث هو التعرف على ماهية فهم وإ الأطفال وأهلهم للأنشطة. أود أن أؤكد على أن المقابلة الشخصية ستركز على هدف البحث كما هو موضح أعلاه، وأؤكد لكم أن المعلومات التي سيتم جمعها من خلال المقابلة الشخصية سوف تستخدم فقط لأهداف البحث، والتي ستبقى سرية.

في حال رغبتكم بالحصول على المزيد من المعلومات، يرجى عدم التردد في الاتصال معي:

جوال: 0599601360

جزيل الشكر لتعاونكم،،

.....

(يرجى تعبئة هذا الجزء وإعادته)

قرارك بالمشاركة في البحث: _____ نعم، أوافق أنا وطفلي على المشاركة في البحث.
لا، لا أُرغب أنا وطفلي بالمشاركة في البحث. _____

إذا نعم، ما هو المكان الذي تفضلونه لإجراء المقابلة الشخصية؟

يرجى اختيار المكان الأنسب لكم من الخيارات التالية:

في المنزل _____ في المركز _____ مكان آخر، حدد _____

التاريخ: _____ اسم توقيع ولي الأمر: _____

عماد الرزي

طالب في جامعة أوصلو/النرويج

Appendix 10: Children's Interview Guide

Interview Guide for Children's Informants

(A) Background information:

- 1) Can you brief me of the following?
 - a. Age
 - b. Classroom (school level)
 - c. Type of school
- 2) Since when are you a member of the cultural center?
- 3) How did you get to know about the center?
 - a. Parents
 - b. Friends
 - c. School
 - d. Others, please specify _____

(B) Perceived understanding and experience of activities

- 4) Why did you become a member at the center?
- 5) What do you do in the center generally?
- 6) How often do you come to the center's activities weekly?
- 7) What are the activities you participate at the center?
- 8) What do you do in the activities?
- 9) Why do you participate in the activities?
- 10) How do you feel while being involved in the activities?
- 11) What makes you feel that way? Why?
- 12) What are the least preferred activities? Why?
- 13) What are the most preferred activities to you? Why?
- 14) How do you describe your relationship to:
 - a. The children at the activities?
 - b. The animators during activities?
- 15) If you were asked about the activities by other children, what would you tell?
- 16) How you see the difference between the center activities and the school?
- 17) Do you advice other children to participate in the center activities? Why?

(C) Perceived effect of activities

- 18) When I asked you about your feeling when participating in the activities you said....., please describe how does that differs from:
- School.
 - Home
 - Other days you don't participate in activities.
- 19) In what way your participation makes changes (better/worse) in your life? Why?
- studies/school
 - relationship/Interaction
 - Family.
 - Animators.
 - Others, please specify_____

(D) Children experiences shared to their parents:

- 20) What do your parents think about the activities? How do you know that?
- 21) Do you share with your parents what you do in the activities? Yes/No
- What you tell them?
 - When do you tell them?
 - Who takes the initiative (you by telling/parents by asking)?
- 22) Are your parents encouraging/discouraging you to participate in the activities? How? Why?
- 23) Why do you think your parents reacted this way?

(E) Conclusion

- 24) Why did you keep participating in the activities?
- 25) Why do you think these centers are organizing the activities?
- 26) What do you think the goal of these activities offered by the children cultural centers?
- 27) What do you think about your participate more/less in the activities on the coming year/s? Why?
- 28) What is the relationship between the center and your home and school?
- 29) Other comments that you would like to add.

Appendix 11: Children's Interview Guide (Arabic)

دليل مقابلة الأطفال

(أ) معلومات عامة

1) هل لك أن تطلعني على ما يلي:

أ- العمر

ب- الصف

ج- نوع المدرسة

2) منذ متى وانت عضو في المركز؟

3) كيف عرفت عن المركز؟

- الأهل.

- الأصدقاء.

- المدرسة.

- أخرى، يرجى التحديد -----

(ب) فهم وتجربة الأنشطة:

4) لماذا أصبحت عضواً في المركز؟

5) ماذا تفعل في المركز بشكل عام؟

6) كم مرة تشارك في أنشطة المركز اسبوعياً؟

7) ما هي الأنشطة التي تشارك فيها بالمركز؟

8) ماذا تفعل في الأنشطة؟

9) لماذا تشارك في الأنشطة؟

10) بماذا تشعر خلال مشاركتك بالأنشطة؟

11) ما الذي يجعلك تشعر هكذا؟ لماذا؟

12) ما هي الأنشطة الأقل تفضيلاً لديك؟ ولماذا؟

13) ما هي الأنشطة الأكثر تفضيلاً لديك؟ ولماذا؟

14) كيف تصف علاقتك ب:

أ- الأطفال في المركز

ب- المنشطين.

15) إذا سألك أحد أصدقائك عن الأنشطة، ماذا ستقول له؟

16) هل تتصح الأطفال الآخرون بالمشاركة في الأنشطة؟ لماذا؟

(ج) فهم تأثير الأنشطة:

17) عندما سألتك عن شعورك اثناء الأنشطة قلت: -----، هل تستطيع ان تصف لي كيف يختلف هذا الشعور من:

ا- المدرسة.

ب- المنزل.

ج- الأيام الأخرى التي لا تشارك بها في الأنشطة.

18) كيف ترى الاختلاف بين أنشطة المركز والمدرسة؟

19) هل ترى ان مشاركتك في الأنشطة قد أثرت (لأفضل/لأسوأ) على حياتك؟ ولماذا؟

أ- المدرسة \ الدراسة.

ب- العلاقات والتفاعل الاجتماعي

- العائلة.

- الأصدقاء.

- المنشطين.

ج- أخرى، يرجى التحديد.

(د) مشاركة الأطفال لخبراتهم مع الأهل

20) ماذا راي أهلك في الأنشطة؟ كيف عرفت ذلك؟

21) هل تشرك أهلك بما تفعل في الأنشطة؟ (نعم/لا)

- ماذا تقول لهم

- متى تقول لهم

- من يأخذ المبادرة (انت من خلال اخبارهم\ الأهل من خلال سؤالهم)

22) هل أهلك يشجعونك\لا يشجعونك للمشاركة في الأنشطة؟ كيف؟ لماذا؟

23) لماذا تعتقد أن أهلك استجابوا بهذا الشكل؟

(هـ) الخاتمة

24) لماذا استمررت في المشاركة في الأنشطة؟

25) لماذا تقوم هذه المراكز بتنظيم الأنشطة حسب اعتقادك؟

26) ما هو هدف الأنشطة المقدمة من المراكز الثقافية من وجهة نظرك؟

27) كيف تنتظر لمشاركتك في المستقبل (اقل\أكثر) بأنشطة المركز؟

28) ما هي العلاقة بين المركز وبين مدرستك وبين منزلك؟

29) أي ملاحظات أخرى تود اضافتها؟

Appendix 12: Parent's Interview Guide

Interview Guide for the parent's Informants

(A)Background Information:

- 1) Can you brief me about the following:
 - a. Age.
 - b. Address.
 - c. Education.
 - d. Profession.
- 2) Since when your child is a member of the cultural center?

(B) Parents understanding of activities:

- 3) based from your understanding:
 - a. What are the activities offered by children cultural center?
 - b. What are they aiming at?
- 4) How the membership of the center's activities started?
- 5) What are the activities your child receives at the center?
- 6) Why you think your child is participating in the activities?
- 7) What is your impression about the activities and the center?
- 8) Why did you allowed your child to participate in the activities?
- 9) How do you describe your child's relationship to the animators?

(C) Parents reflections on the activities:

- 10) To what extent do you see the activities are useful to your child?
- 11) How do you see the relationship between the center and the school?
- 12) What do you think your child feelings being involved in the activities?
- 13) How these feelings differs from:
 - a. Other days he/she don't participate in activities.
 - b. When he/she at school.
 - c. When he/she at home.
- 14) How do you see the differences/similarities between the center activities and the school?
- 15) What are the changes (if there any) that you observed on your child since he/she joined the activities?
 - a. Social relationships (parents/ family/friends/classmates)
 - b. School (Studies marks)/Interests.
 - c. Others, please specify
- 16) Why these changes have happened?
- 17) What your impression about your child thoughts about participation in the activity? Why?

(C) Parent knowledge shared to their children:

- 18) Do you share conversation with your child about the activities?
 - a. Who takes the initiative?
 - b. How often?
 - c. What do you hear from your child?
- 19) To what extent do you think your child is interested in the activities?
 - a. why?
 - b. how do you know that?
 - c. what is the most interesting thing for your child in the activities?
 - d. How do you know about that?
- 20) Do you advise your other children to participate in the center activities? Why?

(D) Parents practices related to activities:

- 21) Why do you think the center is organizing the activities?
- 22) What do you think is the goal of the activities/center?
- 23) Why your child keep participating in the center' activities till now?
- 24) To what extent do you support your child participating in the activities?
 - a. Why?
 - b. How?
 - c. Did you have times you did not support your child? Why? When?

(E) Conclusion and recommendation:

- 25) What do you think would make your child participation better and more useful?
- 26) How long you think would you allow your child to participate in the activities? Why?
- 27) Other comments that you like to add?

Appendix 13: Parent's Interview Guide

دليل مقابلة الأهالي

(أ) معلومات عامة

(1) هل لك أن تطلعوني على ما يلي:

- العمر

- العنوان

- التحصيل العلمي.

- المهنة

(2) منذ متى طفلكم عضو في المركز؟

(ب) فهم الأهالي الأنشطة:

(3) من خلال فهمك؟

أ- ما هي الأنشطة المقدمة من مراكز الأطفال الثقافية؟

ب- ماذا تهدف هذه الأنشطة إلى؟

(4) كيف بدأت عضوية طفلكم في المركز؟

(5) ما هي الأنشطة التي يشارك فيها طفلكم؟

(6) لماذا تعتقد أن طفلكم يشارك في الأنشطة؟

(7) ما هو انطباعكم حول أنشطة المركز؟

(8) لماذا سمحتم لطفلكم بالمشاركة في أنشطة المركز؟

(9) كيف تصف علاقة طفلكم بالمنشطين؟

(ج) إنطباعات الأهالي حول الأنشطة

(10) لأي درجة ترون الأنشطة مفيدة لأطفالكم؟

(11) كيف ترون العلاقة بين المركز والمدرسة؟

(12) ما هو انطباعكم حول مشاعر طفلكم باتجاه مشاركته في الأنشطة؟

(13) كيف تختلف هذه المشاعر عن:

أ- الأيام الأخرى التي لا يشارك فيها طفلكم في الأنشطة.

ب- عندما يكون طفلكم في المدرسة.

ج- عندما يكون طفلكم في المنزل.

(14) كيف ترون الفرق والتشابه بين أنشطة المركز والمدرسة؟

(15) ما هي التغيرات (إذا حدثت) التي لاحظتموها على طفلكم منذ مشاركته في الأنشطة؟

أ- العلاقات الاجتماعية (الأهل والأصدقاء والزملاء).

ب- المدرسة (الدراسة، العلامات، الاهتمامات)

ج- أخرى، يرجى التحديد

16) لماذا حدثت هذه التغيرات من وجهة نظرك؟

17) ما هي انطباعاتك عن رأي طفلك حول المشاركة في الأنشطة؟ ولماذا؟

(د) مشاركة الأهالي لخبرات أطفالهم

18) هل تشتركون مع أطفالكم في أحاديث حول الأنشطة؟

أ- من يأخذ المبادرة.

ب- لأي مدى.

ج- ماذا تسمعون من طفلكم.

19) لأي درجة تشعر أن طفلكم مهتم بالأنشطة؟

أ- لماذا؟

ب- كيف تعرفون ذلك؟

ج- ما هي أهم الدوافع لمشاركة طفلكم في الأنشطة؟

د- كيف علمتم بذلك؟

20) هل تتصحبون أطفالكم الآخرين بالمشاركة في أنشطة المركز؟ ولماذا؟

(هـ) ممارسات الأهل ذات العلاقة بالأنشطة

21) لماذا تعتقدون أن المركز ينظم هذه الأنشطة؟

22) ما هو هدف هذه الأنشطة من وجهة نظركم؟

23) لماذا استمر طفلكم بالمشاركة في الأنشطة حتى الآن؟

24) لأي درجة تدعمون مشاركة طفلكم في الأنشطة؟

أ- لماذا؟

ب- كيف؟

ج- هل كنتم هناك أوقات لم تشجعوا أطفالكم للمشاركة في الأنشطة؟ لماذا؟ ومتى؟

(و) الخاتمة والتوصيات

25) ما الذي من شأنه أن يحسن مشاركة طفلكم في الأنشطة حسب اعتقادكم؟

26) لأي مرحلة شسوف تسمحون بمشاركة أطفالكم في الأنشطة؟

27) ملاحظات أخرى تودون اضافتها؟

Appendix 14: Animator's Focus Group Discussion Guide

Animator's Interview Guide

1. Why are the activities?
2. What kind of environment do you provide, for children, in the course of the activities?
3. Which elements make children like the activities?
4. Which elements may make the children dislike the activities?
5. What do the children feel while participating in the activities?
6. What motivates the children to participate in the activities?
7. How do the activities contribute to the children's learning/development process?
How?
8. Which considerations do you take into account when planning the activities?
9. To what extent do the children decide in the making of the activities?
10. To what extent do you feel that the children have changed; due to participation in the activities?
11. What do the children think about the activities?
12. What do the parents think about the activities?
13. Which are the children's most favorite activities, based on your experience? Why?
14. Which are the children's least favorite activities, based on your experience? Why?
15. How do you view the relationship between you and the children?
16. What do the children gain from the activities?
17. What is the relationship between the activities and school and home?
18. Do you have anything you would like to add?

Appendix 15: Animator's Focus Group Discussion Guide (Arabic)

دليل مقابلة المنشطين

- (1) لماذا يتم تقديم الأنشطة ؟
- (2) ما هي البيئة التي تقدمونها للأطفال خلال الأنشطة؟
- (3) ما هي العناصر التي ترغب وتحبب الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- (4) ما هي العناصر التي تكره الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- (5) بماذا يشعر الأطفال خلال الأنشطة؟
- (6) ما هي دوافع مشاركة الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- (7) ماذا تخدم الأنشطة في عملية تطور وتعلم الطفل؟ وكيف؟
- (8) ما هي الاعتبارات التي تضعونها عند التخطيط للأنشطة المختلفة؟
- (9) لأي درجة يقرر الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- (10) لأي درجة شعرت أن هناك تغيرات على الأطفال المشاركين في الأنشطة؟
- (11) ما هو رأي الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- (12) ما هي آراء الأهالي في الأنشطة؟
- (13) ما هي الأنشطة الأكثر تفضيلاً لدى الأطفال من خلال خبرتكم؟ لماذا؟
- (14) ما هي الأنشطة الأقل تفضيلاً لدى الأطفال من خبرتكم؟ لماذا؟
- (15) كيف ترون العلاقة بينكم وبين الأطفال؟
- (16) ماذا يستفيد الأطفال من الأنشطة؟
- (17) ما هي علاقة الأنشطة بالمدرسة والمنزل؟
- (18) أي إضافات أخرى؟

Appendix 16: Director's Interview Guide

Director's Interview Guide

1. What is the underlying principle for the center's foundation?
2. What is the purpose of the activities?
3. What kind of environment do you provide, for children, in the course of the activities?
4. Which elements make the children like the activities?
5. Which elements make the children dislike the activities?
6. What do the children feel while participating in the activities?
7. What motivates the children to participate in the activities?
8. How do the activities contribute to the children's learning/development process?
How?
9. Which considerations do you take into account when planning the activities?
10. To what extent do you feel that the children have changed; due to participation in the activities?
11. How do you view the relationship between the animators and the children?
12. What do the parents think about the activities?
13. How do you describe the relationship between the center and school and home?
14. How do you describe the relationship between the center and the local community?
15. Do you have any comments to add?

Appendix 17: Director's Interview Guide (Arabic)

دليل مقابلة مديرة المركز

- 1) لماذا كان هذا المركز للطفل؟
- 2) لماذا يتم تقديم الأنشطة في المركز؟
- 3) ما هي البيئة التي تقدمونها للأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- 4) ما هي العناصر التي ترغب وتحبب الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- 5) ما هي العناصر التي تكره الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- 6) بماذا يشعر الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- 7) ما هي دوافع مشاركة الأطفال في الأنشطة؟
- 8) ماذا تخدم الأنشطة في عملية تطور وتعلم الطفل؟ وكيف؟
- 9) ما هي الاعتبارات التي تضعونها عند التخطيط للأنشطة المختلفة؟
- 10) لأي درجة شعرت أن هناك تغيرات على الأطفال المشاركين في الأنشطة؟
- 11) كيف ترين العلاقة بين الأطفال والمنشطين؟
- 12) ما هي آراء الأهالي في الأنشطة؟
- 13) كيف تصفين علاقة المركز بالمدرسة والمنزل؟
- 14) كيف تصفين علاقة المركز بالمجتمع المحلي؟
- 15) أي إضافات أخرى؟